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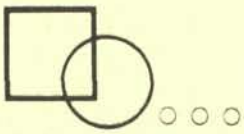

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (ISSN 0003-0937), published quarterly since 1932 by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1981 by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa.

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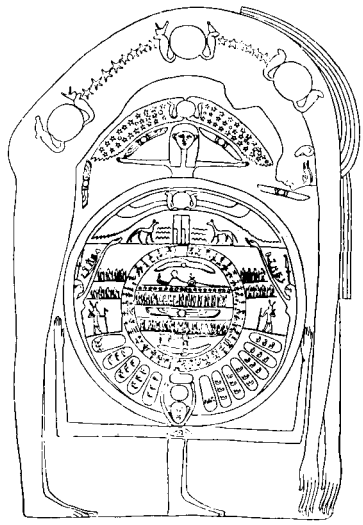

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Out of My Mind

The Bead Game in the Glass House

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

One Sunday last December I encountered an item in the Follow-Up on the News section of the *New York Times* which may have escaped the attention of some people. Under the title "Courtroom Chess" it read as follows:

> It was eight and a half years ago that Bobby Fischer defeated Boris Spassky for the world chess championship in Iceland, and Mr. Fischer has never been in another official chess game since then. In July 1979, however, a sequel to the Icelandic encounter remained to be played: Fox v. Fischer in State Supreme Court in Manhattan.
>
> Chester Fox had sued Mr. Fischer for $3.2 million in damages because the chess grand master had barred him from filming the match in Iceland.
>
> "It's getting a beard on it," Mr. Fox's lawyer, Richard C. Stein, says laughingly of the court case. It came up for trial last winter, he says, and he requested an adjournment because of other pressing business.
>
> Now, he says, he doesn't know when the trial will be held. Like a championship chess game itself, the case has settled into a long waiting pattern.

Sometime in the early spring of 1972 I was sitting in my office in the physics department at Oxford University, where I was a visiting professor, working with my gloves on—there was a coal miner's strike—when the phone rang. A very amiable voice, male, identified itself as an editor of *Playboy* magazine phoning from Chicago. (No, it was not Himself.) He asked if, in fact, I was the Jeremy Bernstein who had written the profile of Stanley Kubrick for *The New Yorker*. Having been assured that I was the very Bernstein in question, he made a remarkable proposition. In brief, I was to go to Iceland, all expenses paid, for as long as I needed, to gather material to write an article on the forthcoming Fischer–Spassky chess match. Furthermore, the magazine had hired the American Grand Master, Larry Evans, as its very own expert, so that if I had any questions about anything on the technical side all I would have to do would be to consult Evans, who would be there for the entire match.

Before I describe my reaction to this Faustian proposal, let me explain its connection with the profile of Stanley Kubrick. Some eight years before this phone call my friend Arthur C. Clarke had introduced me to Kubrick. This was at a time when he and Clarke were just beginning to write their film *2001*. Kubrick was living in New York. (He now lives in a sort of castle outside London.) As was typical of him, he was in the process of absorbing everything that he could read about computers and, having come across my book on the subject, *The Analytical Engine*, he wanted to talk to me to see if I knew anything that was not in the book. We hit it off splendidly and would have gone on talking indefinitely, but suddenly I remembered that I had a date to play chess, for money, in Washington Square Park. I mentioned this to Kubrick and, much to my surprise, he asked me specifically with whom I was going to play. I told him that it was with a professional chess hustler, a Haitian named Fred Duval, who always referred to himself as "the Master." "And now the Master is going to punish you," Duval would say as he dealt a crippling blow to some unwary sucker. Kubrick then said, "Duval is a *potzer*," and I knew that, since I was able to beat Duval barely half the time, the Kubrickian gauntlet had been thrown.

✪ JEREMY BERNSTEIN is a professor of physics at the Stevens Institute of Technology and a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. His latest book is *Hans Bethe: Prophet of Energy*.

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It turned out that Kubrick had actually earned his living at one point hustling chess in Greenwich Village. He once told me that he was earning about three dollars a day at this enterprise. "Which," he added, "goes a long way if all you are buying with it is food." To earn the three dollars, he recalled, he had to play something like twelve hours at a stretch. The "Master," Kubrick claimed, was fairly low on the totem pole of hustlers and was considered, he assured me, to be an easy mark by most of them. Kubrick and I would have played right then and there, except that I had this engagement with Duval, so the whole matter was postponed until I began to write his profile some months later. In fact I entitled the profile "How About a Little Game?"—this being the siren song of the chess hustler—which became our leitmotiv as we engaged in an epic twenty-five game marathon struggle that Kubrick eventually won. This monumental battle took place during the entire filming of *2001*, sometimes in Kubrick's office at the studio where, on one notable occasion, we actually had to draw a board on a piece of paper. All this I described in my *New Yorker* profile, which had caught the attention of the editors of *Playboy*.

After hanging up the phone I had two reactions: the first was an enormous attraction to the idea of going to Iceland, and the second was an equally enormous repulsion at the idea of having my name appear in *Playboy* magazine. By this time, 1972, many of my colleagues were already beginning to think of me as something of a farceur because I was writing fairly regularly for *The New Yorker*. What, then, would they think if I appeared in *Playboy*? I finally resolved this terrible dilemma by proposing to *Playboy* that I write the chess piece under an assumed name. In fact, I had one already picked out: Jay Amber, "amber" being the English translation of the German *Bernstein*. I had hit on this name several years earlier when I thought, for various arcane reasons, that I would write for *The New Yorker* under an assumed name. (This was the era of people like Xavier Rynne, a *New Yorker* writer who wrote about the Vatican, and who, it was claimed, was an entire conglomerate of priests and nuns.) William Shawn, the editor, had told me that this was all right with him, but that in his view I would come to regret it. I don't know if I would have or not, since the experiment was never carried out. If, by the way, the name Jay Amber is unfamiliar to *Playboy* readers, it may have something to do with the fact—as I shall explain—that no article under that name was ever published in *Playboy*.

The first game of the Fischer–Spassky match was scheduled to begin on Sunday, July 2, in Reykjavík. However, it may be remembered that on this day Fischer was not in Iceland, but in Queens, New York, holding out for more money. I was, as it happened, neither in Iceland nor in Queens nor, in fact, at Oxford. I was in Borehamwood *chez* Kubrick where, on Sunday nights, he used to show films in his private projection room. We had taken time out from the film viewing to watch a BBC documentary on Bobby Fischer which was called "This Little Thing with Me and Spassky." It was a fairly conventional documentary enlivened by some shots of Fischer beating the pawns off of a twelve-year-old chess prodigy named Lewis Cohen, and also refusing to eat a birthday cake served to him by Mike Wallace. "I don't eat this kind of cake," Fischer commented. Both Kubrick and I were mesmerized by the following childhood tale: Fischer as a young man was taught to play chess by his sister Joan Fischer Targ. Very rapidly he began to beat her, so they took to exchanging sides when Fischer got ahead. But there were times when his sister was not around, so Fischer played against himself—playing both black and white. As he was describing this he added softly, but very distinctly, and with no trace of humor, "Mostly I won."

Soon it became clear that additional money had been found and that the match would go on, so I headed for Iceland for the first of several trips. It is probably fair to say that that glorious country was then suffering its most extensive invasion by foreigners since the time of Ingolfur Arnarson and his foster brother Hjorleifur, who arrived in 871 fleeing from King Harold Fairhair of Norway. The foster brothers and their friends and relatives settled the island, leaving among their descendants some of the most beautiful women in the world. Many of these could be seen mingling with the three hundred and fifty or so reporters then assembled in Reykjavík.

I encountered two old friends in this group: Harold Schonberg, the music critic of

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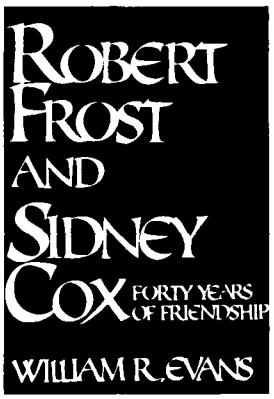

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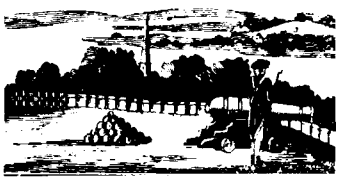

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the *New York Times*, whom I knew from New York and whom I knew to be a devoted and skilled chess player, and George Steiner, whom I had known ever since we overlapped fifteen years earlier as visitors at the Institute for Advanced Study. I knew the minute I saw George that he must be there for *The New Yorker*, which I must admit, illogically, irked me. Why wasn't *he* writing for *Playboy*? In fact, I recall asking George after we met in Reykjavík if, in fact, he knew how to play chess. This was a mistake, since Steiner produced one of the greatest gamesmanship responses I have encountered. "Yes," he said, "and recently I was very proud to get a draw with ———," ——— being some barely pronounceable Slavic-sounding name. This put me in the hopeless situation of having to ask who ——— was, which would have exposed me as being a total dolt. Thinking fast, I decided that the best thing I could do was rapidly change the subject. Steiner eventually produced a widely admired *New Yorker* article entitled "Fields of Force," and a small book of the same title on the general chess phenomenon as illuminated by these matches, and Harold Schonberg produced what was probably the most informed newspaper writing to come out of the tournament.

The first game took place on Tuesday, July 11, at 5:00 P.M. and was scheduled to last until 10:00, an hour that could be predicted since each player was required, by the rules, to make forty moves in no more than two and a half hours. The Reykjavík Exhibition Hall was filled to its capacity of 2,500 people, mainly Icelanders, each of whom had paid five dollars to get in. These figures impressed me because the average annual income in Iceland at the time was estimated to be $2,500, and many people were working two jobs to make ends meet. Five dollars, therefore, was not a trivial sum of money.

First to appear on stage was Boris Spassky, suavely handsome and impeccably dressed. He was greeted by warm applause. By this time, Fischer's antics—which, by the way, had only begun—were already grating on the remarkably tolerant Icelanders. Spassky had white and, promptly at five, he made his first move—pawn to queen four—and started Fischer's clock. (In tournament chess there is a dual clock and each player starts the other's clock after he has made his move.) No Fischer. The thought crossed my mind that he was simply not going to play at all. It must be remembered that before this match Fischer and Spassky had played five times, and Fischer had not won a single game. He had lost three and drawn two. Some eight minutes went by with Spassky walking up and down the stage and peering from time to time at Fischer's empty chair. Then Fischer lumbered in. Looking at him I was somehow reminded of Einstein's not very flattering characterization of Von Neumann, whose politics Einstein must have found abhorrent, as "ein Denktier"—a think animal.

In any event, without so much as looking at the board, Spassky, or the audience, Fischer began the first of an interminable series of arguments with the tournament referee Lothar Schmid, a German Grand Master, and his deputy, Gudmundur Arnlaugsson, an Icelander. What this was all about I will explain shortly. But after this outburst Fischer settled into his specially designed Charles Eames swivel chair, which had been flown in from New York, and proceeded to play, alternating between making moves and jumping out of his chair to argue with the referees. None of this could have improved Fischer's concentration and, indeed, on the twenty-ninth move he made a pawn capture that was so bizarre that it caused Spassky to sit bolt upright in his chair, a humdrum yellow job which he later replaced with one that swiveled, so that he and Fischer could swivel at each other. After a few moves Spassky took Fischer's bishop, and the next day, after a night's adjournment, Fischer proceeded to lose the game in fifty-six moves. Surprisingly, when he resigned he waved at the audience in a most amiable fashion and later was quoted as saying, "Today I played like a fish, but wait until tomorrow."

It was during this opening game that I first became aware of the persona of Chester Fox. Chester was, I would guess, in his middle thirties. He is a likeable fellow with graying, curly red hair and steel-rimmed glasses. Most accounts described him as an entrepreneur, which was fair enough since he had purchased for a sum of money—a sum Chester never revealed to anyone—the exclusive rights to all photographs (still, moving, and television) of the matches. It was never en-

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tirely clear—and this is presumably the subject of the lawsuit referred to in the *New York Times*—from whom Chester had purchased these rights since, one gathers, Fischer never signed his name to anything. Before the matches, Fischer was certainly in favor of wide publicity for them. In fact, between sets of tennis at the La Costa Country Club in California, he had proclaimed that Iceland was a poor place to hold the tournament, because he felt its television facilities were primitive. "Iceland," he stated, "is a dreadful place to hold the matches. They [the Russians] are aware that I am going to win and they want the least possible exposure. Iceland is one place that it is not possible even to use a television satellite." At any rate, Chester was now filming the matches and what Fischer was objecting to was the presence of his cameras. I will not attempt here to detail all of the tedious steps that finally led to Chester's cameras being barred from the scene, but I will recall a few episodes which stand out in my mind.

Fischer refused to play the next game, and Spassky had to suffer the indignity of sitting alone on the stage before 2,500 Icelanders who watched Fischer's clock go a full hour around, before Spassky was declared the winner by default. After this, these good people filed out, uncomplaining, having just been bilked out of five dollars, man, woman, and child. This led to a flurry of bizarre negotiations. It was decided that Spassky would have to go through with this charade three more times before being declared the official winner of the tournament. On Friday the tournament officials decided to inform Fischer of this fact and to try also to persuade him to play the following Sunday. This attempt would have to be made before sundown on Friday, since Fischer had declared himself to be a member of the Worldwide Church of God, which celebrates a strict Sabbath. This raised the remarkable question about when sundown was, since, insofar as the sun sets at all in Iceland in July, it does so somewhere in the neighborhood of midnight. This Talmudic dilemma was resolved by Fischer himself, who declared that, for present purposes, "sundown" was defined to be at 11:45 P.M. And so at 11:45 the ever-smiling but weary chief official, Lothar Schmid, was seen in the lobby of the Hotel Loftleider where Fischer was staying, descending from the Fischer suite with an extremely pessimistic evaluation of the prospects of the tournament continuing.

It had become my own habit, by then, to spend most of my evenings in the lobby of the Hotel Loftleider. It was a wonderful place from which to observe the comings and goings of the various flora and fauna. These included among others Chet Forte of ABC News, who was trying to take over from Chester Fox. Forte was quoted as saying, "Bobby is immature about a lot of facts of life. He doesn't know how TV works or anything. And he's impossible to get to, but once you sit down with him you can change your opinion of him." Not long after "sitting down" with Bobby, Forte and his entire crew left Iceland never to be seen again. There was also the delightful pair of Jerry Weintraub and Sid Bernstein, who had managed, among many other entertainers, the Beatles in some of their early tours in this country. Weintraub described himself to me as one of the top five "skimmers" in the United States, and perhaps the world, and sensing the prospect of a good skim he and Bernstein (no relation) had come to Iceland to toss various proposals at Fischer's feet, which they proceeded to do through a partially closed door in Fischer's suite. I have no idea how they finally made out in their various plans to introduce all sorts of Fischer merchandise to the world, but I think they were responsible for an eerie appearance Fischer made on the *Bob Hope Show* after the tournament ended.

By this time I had already had several genial conversations with Chester Fox, whom I had come rather to like. He was simply trying to do an honest job under impossible circumstances and, it seemed to me, that he was getting the short end of the stick. In any case, one evening, as I was in my accustomed place on a couch in the Loftleider lobby, Chester came over and sat down on the empty cushion next to me. "Is Fischer really that good?" Chester asked, perhaps as much to himself as to me. (I should point out that Fischer had now started to play on a regular basis.) I had gone to London and come back again, my departure having been inspired by my conviction that Fischer was not going to finish the tournament. Not only had Fischer started to play, but he was beginning to beat Spassky

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unmercifully. Not only was he as good as he said he was, but he was so good that not even he knew how good he was. As I was making this clear to Chester Fox, the hotel elevator door opened near where we were sitting and out came Fischer surrounded by his usual entourage. They got into a specially commandeered Mercedes (which Fischer had insisted have an automatic shift) and, I suppose, went off to the American air base at Keflavík, where Fischer liked to let off steam by bowling. While this was happening, Chester turned to me and said, "He had better not see you sitting with me if you want an interview with him." Interviewing Fischer was the last thing in the world I wanted to do, but out of polite curiosity I asked, "Why is that, Chester?" Fox replied, simply, "He hates me." "You see," Chester went on, "after the first game I happened to meet him and he said to me, 'It's nothing personal. I would do the same thing to anyone who got in my way.' I said to him, 'Bobby, you are a very sick boy and should see a doctor.' "

On September 1, at the conclusion of the twenty-first game, Bobby Fischer became the new champion of the world. He had beaten Spassky by the score 12½ to 8½. When asked how it felt to be the champion, he replied, "I've always felt I was the champion."

I returned to New York to write my article. In fact I was now in a dual time bind. *Playboy* wanted the piece by the first of October in order to run it in their February issue, and I, in turn, had to begin teaching in just a couple of weeks. While still in Reykjavík I had thought up a conceit around which to organize the material. I had been reading Hermann Hesse's *Magister Ludi: The Glass Bead Game*, and had been much taken by the aptness of several of Hesse's comments on the deteriorating atmosphere of that game and Knecht's growing discomfiture with it. I had selected a half-dozen quotations from Hesse, each of which would introduce little chapters of the masterwork which I had entitled "Magister Ludi—The Game in the Glass House." I even checked this with my patrons at *Playboy* to make sure that Hesse was not too rich a fare for their readers and, assured that Hesse was quite okay, I finished the article in three weeks. (I have it in front of me now in a rough-hewn typewritten draft.) But I was totally unprepared when, at the end of September, my *Playboy* mentor phoned me to say that there would be no chess article in the magazine. In the meanwhile, it seems, Hugh Hefner had become interested in backgammon and the February issue was to be devoted to that idiotic enterprise, the world champion of which, I am pleased to report, is now a computer. Every other magazine already had its article on the match so mine was never published anywhere, although *Playboy* did pay me for it. So it goes.

Epilogue: Sometime during the summer Harold Schonberg, who had known Fischer ever since he was an adolescent playing in the New York chess clubs, said to me that if Fischer won the tournament he would never play another one. This seemed incredible to me and, also, to fly in the face of all of the declarations that Fischer was making about how he would be the champion of all the people and so forth. Schonberg felt that by playing another match, which he might lose, Fischer could only diminish himself and this he would not do. At this writing, Schonberg seems to have been right. Fischer has never played another public game, and there is no sign that he ever will. Spassky left the Soviet Union and is, I believe, living in Paris. He is still an important figure in international chess. Bernstein and Weintraub have gone from strength to strength in skimming. Kolbrick and I have never played another chess game on the grounds that it is a waste of time. And I, to my great regret, have never set foot again in Iceland.

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About Face

ARISTIDES

"At fifty," wrote Orwell, "everyone gets the face he deserves." I believe this and repeat it with confidence, being myself forty-four and hopeful that for me there is still time. I hope, that is, that within the next six years I shall be able to develop a noble brow, a strong chin, a deep and penetrating gaze, a nose that doesn't disappoint. This may take some doing, for I have been told by different people at different times that I resemble the following odd cast of characters: the actors Sal Mineo, Russ Tamblyn, and Ken Berry, the scholar Walter Kaufmann, the assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, and a now-deceased Yorkshire terrier named Max. Despite this, and even though no one has ever noted a resemblance in me to Alexander the Great or Lord Byron, I tend to think of myself, as I expect most men do, as a nice-enough looking chap. Beyond that I am not prepared to go, for I have long appreciated the fact that the limits of self-knowledge begin at one's own kisser. To have stared at the damned thing so long and yet still not to know what it reveals is a true tribute to the difficulties of self-analysis. So while I tend to believe, with Orwell, that everyone gets the face he deserves, I gaze into the mirror and cannot tell whether justice has been done.

The notion that the face is a text to be read for clues to human character is one with a long history. It goes back at least as far as Aristotle, among whose works is that entitled *History of Animals and A Treatise on Physiognomy.* Almost all work in physiognomy, the putative science dealing with the connection between facial features and psychological characteristics, has been disqualified, and the *Encyclopædia Britannica,* in a brief article on the subject, notes: "Since many efforts to specify such relationships [between facial features and personal character] have been discredited, the term physiognomy commonly connotes pseudoscience or charlatanry (see Fortunetelling; Palmistry)." Which makes very good sense, except that I cannot bring myself altogether to believe it. On the subject of physiognomy, I find myself in the condition of a man I once heard about who, at the end of a career of thirty-odd years working for the Anti-Defamation League, remarked that, after fighting all that time against every racial and religious stereotype, he had come to believe that perhaps there was more to these stereotypes than he had thought when he had started on the job. Rather like that man, I fear that, while I believe physiognomy to have been largely discredited, there may be more to it than an intelligent person is supposed to allow.

But let me take a paragraph to hedge, qualify, and tone down what I have just written. I do not, for example, believe that a large head implies great intelligence, or even that a high forehead implies ample intellectual capacity, though apparently Shakespeare, himself well-endowed in this respect, did. Nor do I believe that a strong jaw inevitably translates into a character of great determination. I do believe, with the poet, that the eyes are the windows of the soul; yet I do not go so far as to say that Elizabeth Taylor, who has the most beautiful public eyes of our day, therefore has the most beautiful soul. I do not believe bad teeth or bad skin symbolic of a grave flaw in character. The handsomest man of our day is Harry Belafonte, but I am not prepared to say that, being the handsomest, he is also the best man. No, if anything, my perceptions here tend to run contrariwise: I wonder why so many people I know who have been dealt features neither elegant nor intrinsically interesting are often, in my view, quite beautiful. Or why many others with

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quite regular, even pretty features seem to have faces quite without interest: see your local television anchorman or anchorwoman. The mystery of personality is written in the human face—this I do believe. But, as with all truly intricate mysteries, this one must be read subtly, patiently, penetratingly.

Allow me to bring forth a text and a truly penetrating reader. I recently found an extraordinary exercise of this kind in the letters of St.-John Perse, the Nobel Prize-winning poet whose real name was Alexis Leger. Leger was asked by Jacques Rivière what he, Leger, thought of André Gide based solely on some photographs of Gide that Rivière had sent him. Leger writes:

> The image, so far as I am able to call it up in my memory, was finally that of a type of man who is basically "serious," incurably serious, much more serious than he would like to appear. I also think that there are, behind that intent kind of face (nose, temples, mouth, and chin) a more painstaking recourse to duplicity, more tentative probings and ruses, more solicitations, in short, than were ever attributed to the impatient Ulysses. The man with the calabashes whom you presented to me in one of the photographs—didn't he look a little as if he were putting something over on himself? Besides, it's quite possible that this sort of man starts out by lying in the same way that one may be imploring—in order to enrich oneself and be tempted on every side, so as to end up liberating oneself, by which I mean, remaining free. But I also think there is something else about Gide, if the photographs didn't betray him, a very methodical urge to charm, a kind of real "coquettishness"—mere subservience and politeness, maybe, in order to keep a safer distance. (I'd prefer it to be only that!) There is usually in the faces of these fruit-tasters a whole elaborate cultivating of instability, dissatisfaction, and irreducible loneliness. And in the Gide you showed me, there was something more, especially in the jaws and hands, which in my eyes is—quite paradoxically—the highest and rarest quality, the mark of a thoroughbred, in an artist as in all other men—an enormous "good sense."—Stubbornness, too, most unexpected beneath so much flexibility.—And sadness, too, to be expected, beneath this art of yielding. Finally, this live human being will find out what it means to be abandoned along the way by all those who settle down; and perhaps he will nevertheless lead two generations of men toward their goals. But if what you wanted to know from me is this, I would trust in, but have little taste for, Gide's friendship—because I firmly believe that a man of this sort intoxicates himself with friendship more than he actually attaches himself to a friend.

From all that I have read of and about Gide, this brilliantly perceptive passage is absolutely on target; in fact, it is rather better than entire books devoted to Gide. How did Leger do it? Only, I suspect, by the same method that T. S. Eliot said one becomes a good critic: by being very intelligent.

Although I have never come anywhere near reading a face so well as Alexis Leger read André Gide's, I have always had an intense interest in faces and from as early as I can remember have watched them the way bird-watchers do birds. One of the pleasures that living in a large city provides is the delight of the large human aviary it affords. Can there be any doubt that the human face, even though it is of a very long run, is still the best game in town? Consider: we are all playing with essentially the same cards—eyes, a nose, a chin, a mouth, cheeks, eyebrows, hair, ears, a forehead—dealt out on the cloth of skin over the front of our skulls. But how inexhaustibly interestingly these cards have been dealt. Noses retroussé or Gogolian, lips sensuous or forbidding, eyebrows wispy or bushy, cheeks puffy or gaunt, chins prognathous or nonexistent, eyes though available in a limited number of colors nonetheless of limitless expressive possibilities—what variety, what modalities within the variety, what variegation within the modalities!

The given in the human face is, of course, heredity. Yet I wonder if heredity—providing skin and eye and hair color, bone structure, et cetera—really furnishes anything more than the broad canvas on which the more delicate and interesting strokes are painted by time and personal fate. What usually makes a face interesting—a priggish nose, quizzical eyebrows, sarcastic lips, lines and wrinkles oddly placed—is there as a result not of heredity but of experience. What time does to a face is most fascinating of all, and I sometimes think that no face, unless it be one of rare beauty or especial hideousness, is of much interest—rather like wine that hasn't had time to age properly—much before thirty.

How difficult to predict what time will do to a face. One of the things that makes prediction so difficult is that, on occasion, the

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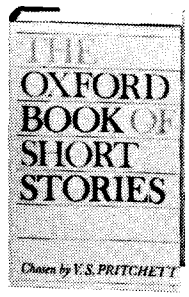

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passage of a face from youth to age is, or seems, so very predictable. Before me are the two Pléiade volumes devoted to the work of Paul Valéry (1871–1945). On the cover of the first is a photograph of the young Valéry, dressed in Proustian style, mustachioed, wearing a wide cravat, dark hair combed across his forehead. On the cover of the second, taken I should guess some thirty-five years later, Valéry's dark hair has turned gray and grown sparser; the cravat has been turned in for a polka-dotted bow tie; the mustache, though less carefully trimmed and now gray, is still intact. The progression from the youthful to the elder face is unmistakably of a piece: the face of the older Paul Valéry records the journey from passion to wisdom, from the poet to the Academician.

But consider another poet, W. H. Auden, on whose face time seems to have played every trick it knows, including changing the very shape of his face. The face of the young Auden was elongated, the ears stuck out prominently; it is a somewhat rural, yokel-like face, unmarked and, at least in photographs, not very interesting. The face of the older Auden is almost too interesting; it is scarcely a face at all but more like a mug of the kind produced by the Royal Dalton Company, a boon to descriptive writers, a face all topography, whose surface might be likened to a map of the moon or of the New Jersey interstate highway system or of the underground lines of Commonwealth Edison. The face of the older Auden resembles nothing so much as a face turned inside out, registering a hash mark for every anxiety and dissipation the poet had ever undergone. The boy cannot be discovered in the face of the man.

Perhaps it is impossible to predict the way a face will age. Most people of a physiognomic bent tend to work backward, which is to say from hindsight. Thus, to cite an example, Richard Perceval Graves, the recent biographer of A. E. Housman, writes of Housman's father: "Photographs of Edward [Housman] reinforce the impression of a man who has inherited some of his father's intelligence, but more of his determination than of his judgment. The mouth and jaw are firm, even obstinate, but the eyes are weak and uncertain." But this reading is entirely ex post facto; Mr. Graves already knows that A. E. Housman's father, though in some ways determined, even obstinate, was a man of poor judgment, uncertainty, and weakness. What he first found in the man's life he afterward discovers in his face. It is the way most of us work.

Yet read faces we must, for however unreliable a method it may be, none other exists for taking at least a rough measure of others. The face, the seat of four of the five human senses, is also the meter of the emotions. The art of the actor is based on this fact. Feelings veiled in fleshly shadows, secret enmities that must not be misread, insincerities that the voice and even the mouth may be able to disguise but not the eyes—all these are to be found in the face. Goodwill and admiration, possibly even love, are writ in the disposition of facial features, and these, too, must be correctly gauged. The significance of a tic could be decisive to one's final fate.

Control of facial features is the first requisite for going out into polite—and, even more important, impolite—society. "False face must hide what the false heart doth know," wrote Shakespeare. Yet many are the occasions when false face must also hide what true heart knows, lest needless offense be given. To be too poker-faced won't do either, unless one happens to be a poker player. Some jobs—that of headwaiter, judge, prostitute—call for a certain fixity of face. That of diplomatist is another. Recall Proust's M. de Norpois, of whom the novelist writes: He "would preserve a facial immobility as if you had been addressing some ancient and unhearing bust in a museum. Until suddenly, falling upon you like an auctioneer's hammer, or a Delphic oracle, the Ambassador's voice, as he replied to you, would be all the more impressive, in that nothing in his face had allowed you to guess what sort of impression you had made on him, or what opinion he was about to express."

Proust is a writer greatly fascinated by faces, and his pages are filled with the subtlest observations upon the human face. In *Swann's Way,* for example, he writes: "Later on, when in the course of my life, I have had occasion to meet with, in convents for instance, literally saintly examples of practical charity, they have generally had the brisk, decided, undisturbed, and slightly brutal air of a busy surgeon, the face in which one can discern no commiseration, no tenderness at the

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sight of suffering humanity, and no fear of hurting it, the face devoid of gentleness or sympathy, the sublime face of true goodness." Yet Proust never really describes a face in anything like full detail. Of M. Swann he tells us only of his "arched nose and green eyes, under a high forehead fringed with fair, almost red hair, dressed in the Bressant style." For Proust it is the face in action that is of the greatest interest—the face as an index for a feeling mind.

But not for all other novelists. Here is George Eliot describing the faces of the Gascoigne family in *Daniel Deronda:*

> It was a noticeable group that these three creatures made, each of them with a face of the same structural type—the straight brow, the nose suddenly straightened from an intention of being aquiline, the short upper lip, the short but strong and well-hung chin: there was even the same tone of complexion and set of the eye. The grey-haired father was at once massive and keen-looking; there was a perpendicular line in his brow which when he spoke with any force of interest deepened; and the habit of ruling gave him an air of reserved authoritativeness.

Now if you can make out what the Gascoignes look like, you are a better reader than I. The straight brow, the short upper lip, the perpendicular line in the brow, the well-hung chin—although George Eliot has given me all the parts, I cannot assemble a convincingly vivid face out of them. She herself must have known this, for later in the same novel, George Eliot wrote: "Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being? even when he is presented to us we only begin that knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by innumerable impressions under differing circumstances. We recognize the alphabet; we are not sure of the language."

The great writers knew that the human face cannot be got down on the page. Although Homer, Shakespeare, and Marlowe all wrote about Helen of Troy, none of the three actually attempted to describe her. Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* goes similarly undescribed, leaving every intelligent woman to believe that Elizabeth probably resembles her. Henry James, who did describe his heroines, always did so by way of indirection, limning in delicious touches, suggesting rather than fully describing, as in the following portrait of the Princess Casamassima:

> She was fair, shining, slender, with an effortless majesty. Her beauty had an air of perfection; it astonished and lifted one up; the sight of it seemed a privilege, a reward. . . . Her dark eyes, blue or grey, something that was not brown, were as kind as they were splendid, and there was an extraordinary light nobleness in the way she held her head. . . . Purity of line and form, of cheek and chin and lip and brow, a colour that seemed to live and glow, a radiance of grace and eminence and success—these things were seated in triumph in the face of the Princess, and her visitor, as he held himself in his chair, trembling with the revelation, questioned if she were really of the same substance with the humanity he had hitherto known.

Yet outward beauty for Henry James is never quite to be trusted. In the novels of Henry James, as Desmond MacCarthy once neatly formulated it, only the good are beautiful, and there are no shortcuts to being good. Perhaps James had learned this lesson early, for one remembers his own meeting, at the age of twenty-six and described in a letter to his father, with George Eliot:

> To begin with she is magnificently ugly—deliciously hideous. She has a low forehead, a dull grey eye, a vast pendulous nose, a huge mouth, full of uneven teeth and a chin and jaw-bone *qui n'en finnessent pas.* . . . Now in this vast ugliness resides a most powerful beauty which, in a very few minutes, steals forth and charms the mind, so that you end as I ended, in falling in love with her. Yes behold me literally in love with this great horse-faced blue-stocking. I don't know in what the charm lies, but it is thoroughly potent.

James's description of George Eliot recalls Stravinsky's remark about Nijinsky's "beautiful but certainly not handsome face." Beautiful but not handsome—one might apply this same formulation to the face of Samuel Johnson or of David Hume or of Leo Tolstoy, who had a potato nose roughly of the kind that the unknown sculptor gave to the actor Karl Malden. Now Karl Malden does not seem to me to qualify as having a face beautiful but not handsome, yet among actors Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson do. So does Fred Astaire, even though he has a disproportionately large forehead, ears that stick out,

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and an odd chin. Coming at things the other way, Robert Redford strikes me as very handsome but not at all beautiful. The most interesting faces, in my view, are the by no means conventionally handsome ones from which beauty nonetheless shines forth. Stan Laurel and Buster Keaton were beautiful; Milton Berle and Johnny Carson are not.

To be conventionally handsome or pretty, on the other hand, seems to me to carry certain penalties. Life seems almost too easy for the patently good-looking—as if, having one of life's most charming gifts, beauty, to begin with, why should they struggle like the rest of us for those rewards that come only by dint of effort. I once heard two eminent scholars comment about a young scholar that he might be too good-looking ever to do any serious work. When a beautiful woman writes—the young Mary McCarthy, say, or the young Susan Sontag—one feels rather as Dr. Johnson did about the dog walking on his hind legs: the wonder is that they do it at all. To be too good-looking is sometimes to incur the dislike, if not the hatred, of the ordinary-looking. The actors John Barrymore, Errol Flynn, and Rock Hudson fall, for most men, into the category of the offensively good-looking. (Whether a similar category exists for women I do not know, though I suspect it must.) I have also known men who have broken off with women because they were too beautiful, and to be out in public with them, where they were the cynosure of all other men's eyes, made these men greatly uneasy.

Beneath the gorgeous exteriors of too good-looking men and women one expects a corresponding gorgeousness of soul. Thus the too good-looking have far to fall, unlike the truly homely, in whom beautiful actions are generally greeted as such a pleasant surprise. Most of us expect to discover a correlation between face and soul, and indeed between body and face. How many times have I heard it said of a very fat woman, "But she has such a pretty face," as if every fat woman ought to have a misshapen face to go with her misshapen body. Fat women have pretty faces almost as invariably as old men are wonderfully spry and kings kindly. It is one of the thousands of small clichés we live by.

Another question is why some faces are photogenic and others are not. It may be that good bones render one more photogenic, but good bones do not necessarily make for a good face. Photographs, like statistics, often lie. Except in the hands of a photographer who is himself an artist, the camera generally misses what is most interesting in the human face. The reason is that faces are almost always most striking in animation. Or an element or aspect is not apparent to the camera lens. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, is generally spoken of as being strikingly handsome; from his photographs, though, he has never seemed so to me. I gather that the color of his hair, eyes, and skin must have contributed greatly to his good looks; and it is color that is missing from the photographs we have of him. Some people, on the other hand, seem almost too pliantly camera-ready. Truman Capote, for instance, has for me the look of someone who has been photographed much too often, the equivalent of a woman who has slept with too many men.

Does that last sentence strike you as goofy? Does it ring sexist, mystical, a mite mad? In his novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Saul Bellow has a woman character whom he describes as showing, through her eyes, evidence of having slept with too many different men. Do such things show in the eyes? John Brophy, in his fine book, *The Human Face Reconsidered*, writes of the eyes, "Although the eyes can thus make vivid communications, their power of expression is restricted: they can plead but not argue; they can state but not analyze; they can declare effects but are helpless to explain causes." Still, to plead, state, or declare effects is to do a very great deal. The eyes are generally conceded to be the most expressive part of the face, though some say that the mouth can be equally expressive. But in this matter I go with the Polish proverb that runs, "Watch closely the eyes of him who bows the lowest."

I know I need to look at, if not deeply into, the eyes of someone with whom I am talking. I find myself slightly resentful—perhaps irritated comes closer to it—at having to talk to someone wearing sunglasses. Worst of all are those mirrored-lens sunglasses that, when you look into them, throw back two slightly distorted pictures of yourself, rather like old-time funhouse mirrors. I like eyes not only to be up front, where God put them, but out front, where I can see them.

What goes for eyes goes for other facial

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features. The ears are said to be the least expressive parts of the face—some talented people can twitch theirs while the ears of others redden when they lie or are under stress—but, in men at any rate, I prefer not to shoot conversationally till I see the lobes of their ears, a thing not always possible under the dispensation of recent masculine hairdos. Charles de Gaulle had big ears; John O'Hara had ears that stuck out from his head; and so do my own, though I do not own up to this fact easily. None of us, I suspect, easily owns up to his own irregularities. I was recently to be met at an airport by someone I had never met before. When I asked him what he looked like, so that I might recognize him upon arrival, he said he was blond, had a mustache, and would be wearing a blue suit. All of which turned out to be quite true, except that he neglected to mention that he also weighed around three hundred pounds.

In the matter of face, what the beholder has become accustomed to is crucial. On people who wear them regularly, eyeglasses come to seem as normal a part of their faces as their eyebrows, and it is often a bit of a surprise to see such people remove their glasses, giving them, momentarily, the look of someone who has freshly emerged from a lengthy underwater swim. Makeup for women, as another example, is now so standard an accessory that no one questions it. Except for brief intervals—the Victorian and Edwardian ages were two such intervals, according to James Laver, the historian of clothes and fashion—women have from biblical times "painted their faces," as was said of Jezebel. Yet no woman who uses makeup today would be judged Jezebelian, and most women, and their men, would agree with the poet Jacques Reval who, in his poem "Macquillage," wrote:

> Leave Nature's crudity to those
> Who'll take it, willy-nilly,
> I study to perfume the rose,
> I *like* to gild the lily.
> And you, my Love, as I have said—
> And I've no cause to doubt it—
> Can safely add a touch of red,
> Who are so sweet without it.

From cosmetics it is a long but all-too-natural jump to cosmetic surgery, as plastic surgery is now called. "God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another," wrote Shakespeare, in what might apply nicely as the cosmetic surgeon's motto. Although cosmetic surgery has done wondrous things in repairing facial damage incurred in fires or other accidents, increasingly a great deal of it is done to improve the work of the unknown sculptor. If one's features can be viewed as cards dealt to one in a poker game, the advent of cosmetic surgery has turned the game into draw poker. One can, with the aid of money to pay the surgeon, throw away two or three disagreeable cards—a comical nose, a weak chin, sunken cheeks—for new ones. Or one can draw new cards—a face lift, removal of bags from under the eyes—to cheat time. Under the aegis of cosmetic surgery, every man (or woman) can become his own Dorian (or Dora) Gray.

The arrangement of hair can do much to change the appearance of a face. Some hairdos soften a woman's face, others make it appear more severe. Baldness in certain men can be a positive feature, rendering them even better-looking than they might be with hair. Men have in their facial arsenal the additional weapons of mustaches and beards. I have friends who have worn beards for so long now that I have to strain to remember what they looked like clean-shaven. Some years ago, and while on holiday, I myself attempted to grow a mustache; I believe I had a Zapata effect in mind, but after two weeks I rather more resembled one of those nondescript *federales* in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Some masculine faces are what I think of as beard-optional. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who is quite unthinkable without his defiant beard, is not among them. One of the most devastating put-downs I have ever been witness to occurred in the office of a man who, far from suffering fools gladly, did not suffer them at all. A co-worker was foolish enough to ask this man if he noticed anything different about him. The man looked up, briefly and contemptuously, to mutter that he didn't. His co-worker said that what was different was that he had shaved off his mustache. The man, this time without bothering even to look up, said, "I didn't know you had one."

In my neighborhood there walks a man who—through a war injury? a fire? an industrial accident?—has had the left side of his

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face blown away. Where features once were, a drape of flesh has been drawn. He is small, tidy, wears a cap, and through his walk and general demeanor gives an impression of thoughtfulness. The effect upon first seeing him is jolting. Life must be hard for him, and one wonders if he has ever grown inured to watching strangers recoil upon initial sight of him. But why is one jolted, why does one recoil? As much as from anything, I think it has to do with one's inability to read his face. One cannot sense his mood or know what he is (even roughly) thinking—and the result is disconcerting in the extreme.

Reading Faces by Leopold Bellak, M.D., and Samm Sinclair Baker is a recently published book (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $10.95) that not only maintains that the project of reading faces is a sensible one but offers a method for doing so. This method is called the Zone System, and the way it works is to divide the human face vertically down the center and horizontally under the eyes. It operates on the correct assumption that the face is asymmetrical. It speculates on the possibility that the division of the brain into left and right functions may have effects on the left and right sides of the face. One cannot say of this book, as Gibbon said of some *Lives* by Jerome, that "the only defect in these pleasing compositions is the want of truth and common sense." But as a self-help book it is, I think, helpful only in a very limited way. For example, by dividing a face horizontally one can sometimes determine that, though its mouth is smiling, its eyes are cold and scrutinizing. It is also interesting to note that, divided vertically, one side of a person's face can seem cheery, while the other seems wary. One might go from there to say that a face so divided may bespeak a person riven in some fundamental way.

But whenever *Reading Faces* goes much beyond this it becomes slightly suspect. Sensibly enough, its authors write, "What one reads in the face are *potentialities*, from which further inferences can be drawn—from conversation, observation, and experience with the person over a period of time." The problem is, though, that most of the faces submitted for study are those of well-known people from politics, sports, and show business, and the analyses offered of their faces by the authors are more than a touch commonplace. In some cases, they show a political bias in favor of old-style New Deal Democrats. Of Eleanor Roosevelt they write, "It is a most unusual face about which one can only say good things." Having been brought up in a home in which Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were well regarded, I tend to go along with this reading. But where our authors find such traits in Mrs. Roosevelt's face as intelligence, compassion, and optimism, an old-line Taft Republican could as easily find naiveté, smugness, and self-righteousness.

One serious question about faces is whether one can find beautiful or even agreeable-looking someone whom one despises. Moral judgments, as Santayana noted, take precedence over aesthetic ones, or at least do so for most of us. So when confronted with a person one detests, perhaps the best one can say is that he or she is very good-looking—yet one is likely to add, "at least to the superficial observer." What makes this observer superficial, of course, is that he is not privy to the real lowdown about the despicable character in question. Yet how much easier it is to read backward, through hindsight, from behavior to evidence of behavior in the face. As John Brophy reminds us, during Hitler's rise and early years in power, no one detected the insanity we now see so clearly in his face. The aged, puffy, baby face of Winston Churchill, a cigar clamped in its mouth, might appear, to someone who has no knowledge of what Churchill accomplished, as a perfect subject for an anti-smoking poster.

Reading Faces being a self-improvement book, its authors suggest that one's own face might repay study in the coin of self-improvement. "The map of your face *can* be changed," they write, "resolving conflicts and strengthening feelings of self-esteem. This improvement will be reflected quickly or gradually in your facial expression." Specifically, they urge that one do all in one's power to make oneself seem a brighter, cheerier person—to put, in other words, a bit of gee whiz in your phiz. Here they have hit home with this particular reader. I have been told innumerable times that I looked depressed, usually on occasions when I felt nothing of the kind. Is it necessary to say that the effect of being told this is itself quite depressing? Even more depressing is that I have never found a useful retort, though I have considered the

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following: "Depressed, me? On the contrary, I was thinking about sex." Or: "Yes, I have been feeling rather depressed of late. What has been getting me down is the Sino-Soviet dispute. Do you have time to talk with me about it?"

The genius of the unknown sculptor is to have created what sometimes seems a rather limited number of human facial types yet, within this limited number of types, an infinite variety. With only rare exceptions, almost every face one sees one has seen before, if not in life, then in the work of the great painters. Walking the streets one sees here a pair of kindly Holbeinesque lips; there the porcelain cheeks of a Botticelli; elsewhere the rubicund coloring of one of Bruegel's peasants; and sometimes a face taken over from Rembrandt entire. If flesh and bone be the material of the face, time supplies its varnish. And what extraordinary things time does, leaving this face unmarked, that one looking as if it were a salmon mousse left out in the rain. To read the effects of time on a face requires, as the New Critics used to call it, close reading. "For in order to understand how beautiful an elderly lady can once have been," Proust wrote, "one must not only study but interpret every line of her face."

Nothing so improves the appearance as a high opinion of oneself. Let this stand as the first in a paragraph riddled with risky generalizations. Love of one's work tends to make one's face interesting. Artists have animated faces, and performing musicians the most animated of all. Suffering, too, confers interest on a face, but only suffering that, if not necessarily understood, has been thought about at length. Uninterested people have uninteresting faces. In ways blatant or subtle, personality sets its seal on every face. Some people have historical seals set on their faces as well; thus some men and women walk the streets today with Romanesque, Elizabethan, or Victorian faces. Intelligence is more readily gauged in a face than is ignorance. As a final generalization, let me say that the more precisely one thinks of the relation of face to character, and the more carefully one attempts to formulate the connection between the two, the madder the entire business begins to seem.

Yet what choice have we but to continue reading faces as best we can, bringing to the job all that we have in the way of intuition, experience, intelligence? We read most subtly of course those people we know most closely: our friends, our known enemies, our families. In the faces of such people we can recognize shifting moods, hurt and pride, all the delicate shades of feeling. But of that person we supposedly know most intimately, ourself, the project remains hopeless. Study photographs of ourselves though we may, stare at ourselves in mirrors though we do, our self-scrutiny generally comes to naught. If you don't believe me, stop a moment and attempt to describe yourself to someone who has never seen you. The best I can do is the following: "I look a bit like Lee Harvey Oswald but I also rather resemble my dog, though I seem more depressed. You can't miss me."

Mary Elinore Smith

1906–1981

Editorial Assistant, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1975–1981*

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Sorting Old Papers

DONALD DAVIE

Old poems from long ago
Surface in memory or
In long-forgotten print.
A stranger's; let them go.

But note: one is reimbursed
For images left open
To a second application,
Time having quashed the first.

And one remembers how
Unnecessary it seemed,
How craven, hedging a bet on
Fallings away from "Now."

Let them go with the years!
They do that better now
For speaking double: what one
Wants to hear, one hears.

Well, hawkeye sees the green
Where we would least expect it:
Side issues, well enough;
Where growth is, there serene.

DONALD DAVIE, professor of English at Vanderbilt University, is the author of *Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry.* His *Collected Poems* was published in 1972.

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God, Gallup, and the Episcopalians

CLEANTH BROOKS

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND has been its ability to provide shelter for a number of rather diverse groups: on what we might call the left (the Low Church Evangelicals, who closely resembled the moderates of the various Protestant denominations); on the right, the High Churchmen, who were sacramentalists, valuing ritual, generally traditional and orthodox, and who in the nineteenth century preferred to be known as Anglo-Catholics; and in the center, a group of moderates, rather liberal in theology, often called Broad Churchmen.

It was natural that an established church, a state church, should try to make room for as many Englishmen as it could. But the need to do this entailed its own penalties: the danger of defection, particularly on either flank. Two serious defections in the past were those of the Non-Jurors, devout and learned sacramentalists, at the end of the seventeenth century, and the evangelical Wesleyans at the end of the eighteenth century. More than a loss of mere numbers in these and other defections was always involved, for those who were expelled or who left voluntarily tended to be men and women of principle and special conviction. Nevertheless, the Church of England and, later, its daughter church, the Episcopal Church in America, generated an élan of their own, and both could take pride in their tolerance of difference and what might be called their theological temperance. Seen against the stormy background of ecclesiastical history, these are virtues not to be despised. The loyal Anglican could even make himself the butt of a joke, describing the three internal factions with a smiling complacency as "Low and lazy, Broad and hazy, and High and crazy." After all, the Church had preserved its unity, and the eccentricities of some of its members could be regarded with indulgence.

In the last few years, however, the situation in the American Church

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has changed. The number of defections has been increasing—to Rome, to one or another of the Orthodox churches, to the Anglican Catholic Church (which has been formed by some recent dissidents from the Episcopal Church), or to no church—the dissidents simply dropping out. In any case, the Episcopal Church has been losing members. Ten years ago the loss was put at half a million. A priest of the Church has recently estimated that in the last fifteen years at least a million have left the Episcopal Church. Such figures, if correct, are ominous for a church whose high watermark in our present century amounted to only three and a half million members.

As in centuries past, the contemporary dissidents have come principally from the flanks, especially from the Anglo-Catholic wing, though the Evangelicals have also been disturbed by what both they and the Anglo-Catholics perceive as the tendency of the centrist group to accommodate the Church to the modern world—specifically, to shift the Church away from transcendence toward immanence; from the otherworldly toward a concern for this world; from an emphasis on man's sinfulness and need for repentance toward an enthusiastic celebration of his powers and possibilities; from worship toward social action. Both Evangelicals and Sacramentalists would argue that these alternatives are not mutually exclusive and that one need not, and must not, choose one of the pair and reject the other. A balance is required; yet that balance is what the centrist bloc—what amounts to a sort of politburo—is in the process of destroying.

Though it is the *general* drift toward secularism that has been alarming to Episcopalians, three episodes in the recent past have pointedly marked the drift, not only by what they imply theologically but by what they reveal about the motives of those who direct the Church's present course.

The belief that the Church was becoming so tolerant that one could believe whatever he liked was pointed up several years ago in the Bishop Pike affair. James Albert Pike, though a latecomer to the Episcopal Church, enjoyed in it a distinguished—and at points, even sensational—career. In 1952 he became Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and, in 1958, Bishop of California. He was outspoken on social issues and on theological doctrine. His pronouncements attracted much attention, and those on doctrine brought down upon him charges of heresy. But his fellow bishops, in 1966, preferred to censure him rather than to try him for heresy.

I well remember talking at the time to one of the bishops, a gentleman of the old school. He lacked imagination, but he was a good man. The idea of a noisy scuffle distressed him. He made it plain to me that he

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shrank from any notion of discipline: better simply to shrug off Pike's eccentricities. Anything that smacked of a heresy trial would be bad for the Church. But as André Suarez has observed, "There are no heresies in a *dead* religion."

Joan Didion has recently provided a very interesting assessment of Pike as an American cultural phenomenon. In *The White Album* she recounts how Pike, as Bishop of California, "streamlined the Trinity, eliminating the Son and the Holy Ghost." A very different note is sounded in the biography of Pike, by William Stringfellow and Anthony Towne, entitled *The Death and Life of Bishop Pike.* Miss Didion describes it as "an adoring but instructive volume." She is right on both counts. Because it does not condemn, but exalts, Pike—"adoring" is here hardly an excessive adjective—this book is all the more instructive as to why any churchman who valued orthodoxy had to be alarmed at Pike's presence in the College of Bishops.

A second such issue was the ordination of women as priests, and particularly the way in which that act was accomplished at the Minneapolis Convention in 1976. The issue was not that women were inferior to men either in intelligence or virtue. Everything, from recent university achievement records to the ancient calendar of the saints, refutes the nonsense of those objections. The real issue was the possibility that such ordination would call in question the Episcopal Church's claim to the apostolic succession, and thus constitute another obstacle to its eventual reconciliation with the Orthodox churches of the East and the Roman Catholic Church of the West.

The opponents of women's ordination were also deeply disturbed by the rather airy and inconsequential way in which the Episcopal Church had carried out its unilateral action: the Church had deemed it quite sufficient to rule that wherever the canons of the Church read "he," the reader was to understand that "she" was also implied.

The third action that has caused disaffection was the adoption in 1979 of a revision of the Book of Common Prayer, a revision so thorough that it is properly not a revision at all but in fact constitutes a new book. I am inclined to think that the new Prayer Book has proved the worst irritant of all, a weekly mortification of the spirit Sunday after Sunday.

I intend, for several reasons, to devote more space here to discussing the Prayer Book than to any other issue. First, because it has disturbed the laity more than what may be theologically more weighty concerns. Second, because an examination of the new book will tell us so much about its makers and the ecclesiastical powers that ordered it to be made. Third, because I frankly think that I possess more firsthand information about this matter than about the other two.

The rejection of the old Prayer Book was something like the demoli-

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tion of a historic building. For over four centuries it has been regarded as a monument of great prose. It has influenced the English language with memorable images and phrasing. Only the King James translation of the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare have affected our language so much. Why did the Episcopal Church discard this precious inheritance? Various people have asked the question publicly, including Roman Catholics, Protestants, and many who profess no Christian faith at all. A man of letters of international stature has more than once asked me: "Why in the hell has your church discarded the one thing it has that could seriously attract people who value language of beauty and power? I just can't understand it." Yet this act is what we must try to understand.

We must try to understand it if we are to hope to understand the present character of those who now have the ecclesiastical machinery in their hands. Their own justification of what they have done will reveal a great deal. One might begin by examining their charge that those who defend the traditional Prayer Book worship a book instead of the Lord God on High. Since you worship the old Prayer Book, they have said, you are really idolators. No matter how splendid the traditional Prayer Book is as a work of great prose, there is something far more important than any book: the knowledge of God himself and his mission for his people.

One can cheerfully grant that any prayer book is only a means to an end. But the proponents of radical revision beg the real question here. For though they argue that the language used in liturgy and prayer is finally of no importance in itself, they do not themselves put language aside as if one could reach God directly and without the mediation of language. Thus the revisionists are not asking the ordinary communicant to seek the wordless revelation of God that a few of the saints have attained in mystical experience. Not at all. Instead, they turn up with a new book of their own.

The issue, then, is not whether we can discard language in our worship, but whether the language of the 1979 revision is superior to that of the traditional book: does one book serve the parishioner better than the other?

On this ground, every defender of the old book would be happy to meet them. The problem of the defenders of the old book has been that they have found it difficult to persuade the revisionists to take up the challenge. Rather, the revisionists have preferred to rest on the assumption that a prayer book must use language that is up-to-date. Just as any good American would automatically want to trade in his old 1972 automobile for a 1981 model, they yearn for a contemporary prayer book. Some years ago an important Episcopal layman observed in the *New*

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York Times that the traditional Book of Common Prayer doubtless had been a good book for the Elizabethans, but that he and the rest of us were not Elizabethans. We needed a twentieth-century production.

Actually, the foundations of the traditional Prayer Book were laid before Elizabeth I ascended the throne. But never mind; our layman's slip is minor. What is not minor is his bland assumption that a book of another age is, by that fact, of no importance to a later age. Are the plays of Shakespeare outmoded because he was born over four centuries ago? Has Milton's *Paradise Lost*, now some three centuries old, nothing to say to men of the last decades of the twentieth century?

I can hear the voice—if not of the layman I have cited, then of many like him—protesting that literary works of art are different. Shakespeare and Milton wrote poetry, but with a prayer book we are not talking about poetry but about the great verities, matters of the highest moment.

Such expostulation is to be expected. In this country, the man in the street still does not take poetry seriously. He sees it as a kind of make-believe, a kind of frippery, an embroidery on life. It is small wonder that he distrusts poetry, for he has a general distrust of language itself. He characteristically says that he wants to get down to brass tacks—the hard facts. One can agree with him that language can be deceptive, can be ambiguous, can be misused by advertising agencies, public relations men, fraudulent politicians, and just plain liars. The term "rhetoric," which originally meant simply the ability to choose words and arrange them for effective exposition, description, or persuasion, nowadays gives off a certain smell. This formerly honorific term is definitely in bad odor.

We do need to be careful in our handling of language. But, again, we can't simply dispense with it. For better or worse, we are stuck with language. Therefore, the more we learn about language, the sillier it becomes to think that we can determine, by referring to the publication date, whether some works—poetry or prayer books—are worn out. Our language itself is old. Moreover, some of the newest fabrications of language are the least effective.

In any case, the archaic character of the traditional Prayer Book's diction has been much exaggerated. A few words are indeed archaic, but not necessarily unintelligible. It has been argued that the diction of the traditional Prayer Book was already archaic when it was first published—and deliberately so, for Thomas Cranmer, its chief author, was seeking something like a timeless language. In any case, the language of his Prayer Book has worn very well. By replacing a few obsolete words, one could make it perfectly clear without destroying its essential quality. One need not do even that if the Episcopal Church were, as it claims to be, truly a teaching church. By spending only a little time in explaining

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the meaning of some dozen words, it would remove all mere opacities of language. (In forty-five years of college teaching I have not discovered anyone who could not be interested in words and how they work. Even very young people are eminently teachable.) In view of the current record of the public school system in teaching reading and writing, some help from the Church ought to be welcome. For, truth to tell, with the national literacy rate declining year by year, one can predict that a great many words, even some in the new 1979 book, will, a few years hence, not be "understanded of the people."

Actually, the real difficulty in understanding the old Prayer Book is not the presence of a handful of archaic words and forms. The real difficulty lies (1) in the figurative language, which the revisionists have been able to do little about, and (2) in the statements of the deep mysteries of the faith, a problem with which no prayer book in and by itself can satisfactorily cope.

Metaphor or figurative language is part of the nature of poetry. I am not saying that the faith presented in the Prayer Book is *merely* poetry. I am saying that the attempt to mediate to the worshipper matters of faith and religious experience necessarily involves the use of figurative language. Much of even the 1979 Prayer Book takes the form of poetic expression. Here is an example. The editors tell us, "The Psalter is a body of liturgical poetry." Of course it is, and how do the new translators fare in handling this poetry? As someone put it succinctly, the new Psalter "is a disaster." It is indeed.

Dorothy Mills Parker, in her excellent pamphlet *The Prayer Book Issue,* cites typical infelicities. In the old Prayer Book, verse 1 of Psalm 69 reads: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in, even unto my soul." The 1979 Prayer Book renders it thus: "Save me, O God, for the water has risen up to my neck." We move from austere grandeur to awkward literalness. The cry sounds like that of a careless bather who has let himself be caught offshore by the incoming tide. The reader will exclaim, "Save me, O God, from such a translation."

Margaret A. Doody, in her devastating commentary on the 1979 Prayer Book, collects several such gems of ineptitude from the new translation. In the old Prayer Book, verse 9 of Psalm 84 reads: "For one day in thy [the Lord's] courts is better than a thousand." The corresponding passage in the 1979 Book reads: "For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room." Professor Doody observes that the addition of "in my own room" is irresistibly comic, reminiscent as it is of the bed-sitting-room, that abomination of the British boardinghouse. Besides, "who wouldn't rather be anywhere else than shut up in one's room for a thousand days?"

It may be, for all I know, that the new translations represent faithful,

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literal translations from the Hebrew. But if so, that circumstance is not good enough. For we also have to be concerned with the impact of the Psalms, the prayers, and the liturgy upon English-speaking worshippers, and the matter that counts is what they say and do to the worshipper.

Much more is at stake than updating—and so often destroying—the poetry of the Psalms. The process of distortion and enfeeblement goes on throughout the 1979 text. For example, consider the new response to the priest's salutation to his people, "The Lord be with you." Instead of the traditional book's "And with thy spirit," the revisers give us "And also with you." I submit that this new form is just not current English. As Ben Jonson rather ungraciously said of Edmund Spenser's poetry, it is "writ in no language."

If the aim of the revisers was to translate the Prayer Book into modern conversational idiom, they have signally failed. How might the reply of the worshippers be phrased? "I pray the same for you"? "The same to you"? Even, just possibly, "And with you too"? All these seem to me "sayable" in contemporary English, though varying in tone from a formal utterance to a jaunty colloquialism. But if being up-to-date is really of great importance, then let's be truly up-to-date, not merely protest that we are.

So much for the failure to put the Prayer Book services into up-to-date English. Lack of space forbids any multiplying of examples. The reader who wants more can find them in abundance in Margaret Doody's article, a contribution to the recently published *The State of the Language.*

Now my second point. When the revisers come to providing clear and intelligible accounts of the Christian mysteries, they fail abjectly. Consider, for example, the revisions in the Nicene Creed. In the traditional book the Creed begins:

> I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible: And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made: Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man. . . .

Compare the corresponding version in the 1979 book:

> We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and our salvation he came down

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from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

If simplification and clarification were really the goals of the revised version, such virtues have scarcely been attained. For if the average layman has trouble understanding the distinction between being "made" and being "begotten," is his situation improved by specifying that the Son is "eternally begotten of the Father"? For the layman, "eternally begotten" will set up its own problems. (I am speaking throughout, of course, of laymen, not theologians. But then, a service book is for the man in the pew and has to be judged accordingly.)

Again, what was the intention of altering "by the Holy Ghost" to "by the power of the Holy Spirit"? Why in particular state that the incarnation was accomplished by "the *power* of the Holy Spirit"? Does this specification of a power possessed by the Third Person of the Trinity leave the doctrine of the Virgin Birth where it was, or doesn't it? If it does, "by the power of" seems redundant in view of the fact that in any effective agent the *power* to act is implied. If not, was the intention of the new formulation to dilute the doctrine? In short, if the theology is affected, then perhaps the theological conservatives do have a right to be apprehensive.

To take up two smaller matters. First, "seen and unseen" simply doesn't mean the same thing as "visible and invisible." Second, even if "we" can be ascertained to be the pronoun used in the primitive church, may it not, in a skeptical age like our own, be useful to ask for a more definitely personal commitment?

My general point, however, is much wider than the matter of any particular doctrine. One ought not to scold the authors of the revised Prayer Book for failing to do something that cannot be done: to define clearly *in the liturgy itself* the precise meaning of an abstruse doctrine. Surely theological teaching and exposition have to be done by the rector or the vicar, over a period of time and from time to time. This has always been so. You cannot depend upon liturgy alone to perform this task.

Incidentally, I have the feeling that those who have put together the 1979 Prayer Book have expected too much of the liturgy. At the same time, they have had too little regard for a proper language. As a result, the language they use constantly betrays their hopes—in its flatness and banality, its disconcerting mixtures of metaphor, its failures of tone, and its frequent descents into sheer bathos.

How could all this have happened? Because the strength of the Standing Liturgical Commission lay in its knowledge of the origins and history of the liturgy, the varieties developed in the Eastern Church and in the Western, with their special virtues and deficiencies. Such scholar-

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ship is important and has its uses. The members of the Commission apparently sought to recover the ancient rites of the primitive Christian church—an aspect of the age-old Protestant dream?—and to remove from the traditional Prayer Book what they perceived to be undesirable accretions from the Middle Ages. In particular, they have sought to encourage the active participation of the laity and to lighten the penitential tone of the liturgy. They wished to transform it into a joyful thanksgiving. (Some theologians feel that they have gone much too far in minimizing the sense of sin and man's need to feel penitent.)

Yet it can be plausibly argued that, in their concern to recover the modes and rites of the primitive church, they—and not the defenders of the traditional book—have become the true antiquarians. For even if the authors of the 1979 Prayer Book could recover the structure of the primitive rite, they cannot recover for the present-day English or American worshipper the now dead languages in which the ancient rites were expressed. Therefore, what shall it profit the Liturgical Commission, or the bishops who accepted its findings, to know all about the Gelasian Sacramentary, the Gallican liturgies, the ancient forms of the epiclesis, and so on, if the English they employ fails to touch the heart or give a sense of the numinous and the holy? How shall we sing the Lord's song "in a strange land?" the Hebrews lamented in their Babylonian captivity. It may be even harder to sing the Lord's song—or even to speak it—in an inept prose.

Those who direct the course of the Episcopal Church seem to have reposed complete confidence in their committee of experts—how American all this is!—not asking whether the members of the Commission possessed an expertise in the English language that matched their expertise in the history of liturgical development. Furthermore, the members of the Commission did not make use of such experts in the English language as were available: the Church's poets, fiction writers, and literary scholars. Very few of the writers and scholars whom I know personally feel that a radical revision of the traditional book was necessary.

One of them was indeed approached for help—W. H. Auden, the poet. He replied that a committee could no more produce a good prayer than a committee could produce a good poem. Anyway, he did not serve, and as for his opinion of the revision, he was to write: "The Episcopal Church . . . seems to have gone stark raving mad. . . . The English language [in the sixteenth century] had already become more or less what it is today . . . but the ecclesiastics of the sixteenth century possessed a feeling for the ritual and the ceremonies which today we have almost entirely lost."

The Anglican Church's failure, on both sides of the Atlantic, to make use of its brilliant literary figures among the laity of our century amounts

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to a scandal. If additions—propers and alternate prayers or special occasional prayers—were needed for the Prayer Book, why did the Church not turn to its masters of prose like C. S. Lewis, or poets like T. S. Eliot? For example, Eliot's wonderful chorus of praise in *Murder in the Cathedral* is a magnificent modern Te Deum. No one wants to bar first-rate twentieth-century writing simply because it is new, any more than sixteenth-century writing simply because it is old.

For a long time the Episcopal Church has taken a proper pride in its learned clergy. The melancholy fact is that it might be very difficult to vindicate such a claim any longer. (Recommended for the Episcopal seminaries: a course in logic—enough at least to help the student recognize a non sequitur or a false option when he encounters it; several courses in English literature, sufficient at least to acquaint the student with the way the English language works and what it can and cannot do; and of course, solid training in theology.)

It ought to be pointed out that the Episcopalian in the pew did not ask for a radically changed prayer book. The incentive for change came from the top. And, one may ask, what has been the general attitude of the ecclesiastical establishment toward the man in the pew? Apparently pretty much that of any bureaucracy. There was a confidence that, with the passage of time and with some retraining, the layman would become habituated to the new book. An elaborate retraining process was devised and spread out over nearly two decades. Thus, various "trial" services were issued; reactions and constructive suggestions from the laity were requested.

The model used would seem to be a true model of participatory democracy. But anyone who has actually gone through such a process soon recognizes that the cards are being dealt him from a carefully stacked deck. I do not mean to suggest that there was any fraudulent intent. But most laymen—whether the school board is proposing a new curriculum to the community of parents or the Church is proposing a new prayer book to its laity—are confused or timid in speaking out to the experts. The very terms in which the discussion has been laid out, not to mention the plausible answers which trip off the tongue of the group leader who "explains" everything, render the questioner mute. The method, I repeat, in practice often amounts to nothing more exalted than "Mother Church knows best," or even than the restaurant waiter's plea to the diner: "Try it. You'll like it."

Nevertheless, after many years and all the trial services, many Episcopalians still do not like the new book. The Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer again and again asked the Church authorities to hold a referendum on the subject. The request was steadily denied. Finally the Society engaged George Gallup to conduct a poll,

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which was carried out in May and June 1979. The results showed that the laity overwhelmingly favored the traditional book. Preference for the traditional Prayer Book was approximately three to one (63 percent to 23 percent), with those in favor of the traditional book feeling more strongly about their choice than those who favored the revised book. By contrast, 80 percent of the clergy preferred the revised book (14 percent the traditional book). The results would indicate that the opposition to the 1979 Prayer Book was not merely that of a group of disgruntled English professors. The laity lined up solidly with them against the bishops and the rest of the clergy.

How seriously must one take the Gallup poll? Well, it can hardly be simply dismissed. The Gallup organization is generally regarded as the most respected of all our polling services. In its method of sampling, the poll on the Prayer Book was of exactly the same character as the other Gallup polls. In any case, the Gallup poll is about all that we have that has any sort of claim to objectivity. Its results certainly accord—for whatever that is worth—with my own experience in my parish church in New England and with what I have heard from Episcopalian friends throughout the country.

I was present at the press conference where Mr. Gallup presented his report and where he answered questions about it. I remember talking at that time with a young priest, the representative of one of our Church papers. He had not been impressed. The Gallup report, he maintained, was not the voice of the Episcopal Church. He did not specify what that voice was, but clearly it was and is the voice of those who control the ecclesiastical machinery. This young priest did not expect the Episcopal Church to retain the traditional Prayer Book, and of course he was proved right, for later that year the Convention of the Church at Denver made the revised Prayer Book the Church's official Prayer Book.

It did vote, however, that the traditional Prayer Book might be used under certain circumstances. But the use was, among other things, conditional on the permission of the bishop of the diocese and on that of the rector or vicar of the parish—permission that the layman quickly found was not always forthcoming.

Not long ago what I take to be the official voice of the Church was heard through the Reverend Richard J. Anderson, the executive for communications for the Episcopal Church. He deposed that "the intent of the Denver Conference was to change, not to use [the old Prayer Book] for ever and ever. The proposal [to allow use of the traditional Prayer Book] did not authorize the use of the old on the same basis as the new forever."

Consequently it seems reasonable to regard the Denver proposal as

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merely a sop to the conservative man in the pew, just as in the 1979 Prayer Book, Rite I—a rite using traditional language and bearing a fairly close resemblance to the traditional book—is a sop to the older parishioners who cannot get used to the newer rite. When the older generation dies off, that problem will have solved itself. The future clearly belongs to the radically revised Rite II.

In view of such changes and some subsequent defections from its membership, what is the future for the Episcopal Church in America? I am no prophet and it behooves me to be very chary of predictions. In this essay I have been primarily concerned to show how the Church has been affected by (perhaps has compromised with?) the forces of liberal secularism. The revised Prayer Book seems to me an excellent barometer for recording these changes. The very fact that the new Prayer Book was adopted against the wishes of an overwhelming majority of the rank-and-file communicants may also have some significance in any speculation on the future of the Episcopal Church.

Will the Episcopal Church continue to lose disaffected members? Again, I prefer not to prophesy. The breakaway churches, such as the Anglican Catholic, may or may not swell their ranks with dissident Episcopalians. A number of my Episcopalian friends have become members of the Anglican Catholic Church; others have become Roman Catholics or Greek Orthodox. But who knows with any certainty what will happen?

Yet the Episcopal Church as newly reorganized has already received one snub that must have hurt. Episcopal leaders tended to shrug off the warnings that the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox churches might be disturbed by the Episcopal Church's ordination of female priests. They pointed out that the Roman Catholic Church includes many who favor the priesting of women, and they predicted that eventually such ordination will come about in the Roman Catholic Church too. They even surmised that the role of the Episcopal Church is to lead the way. A few months ago, however, Rome spoke to this effect: it offered a haven to those Episcopalians who had been dismayed by their Church's ordination of women, and indicated that even married Anglican clergymen might become Roman Catholic priests in something like a Uniate status; if married, they would not have to give up their wives and would be allowed to retain most of their Anglican liturgy.

The feasibility or desirability of this step for either dissident Episcopalians or for the Roman Church itself is not my point here; rather, it is Rome's implicit rejection of the hopes of the Episcopalian establishment and Rome's apparent willingness to come to some kind of terms with disaffected Episcopalians.

As earlier noted, the Episcopal Church has long been regarded not

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only as an umbrella church which could offer shelter to quite disparate groups. It has also been regarded as a "bridge church," a church that stood in a mediate position between Protestantism and Catholicism, both Greek and Roman, and therefore a body that held out a promise of someday bringing about the unification of Christendom.

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus sardonically defines a pier as a disappointed bridge, a bridge that has not made it across the water to the other side. At the moment, the Episcopal Church would seem to be a disappointed bridge. On one side, it is now all the more firmly anchored to the shore of what may well become a large American pan-Protestant church. But the Roman—not to mention the Orthodox—bridgehead looms even farther away.

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Fawn

PETER DAVISON

Late summer dusk. Headlights along the road.
A sudden apparition by the hedge.
My car swerved aside of its own wish,
an instep arch crushed on the brake pedal,
and stopped in an instant. Jumped out
to learn whether we had killed anything
without a sound or click of contact.
Lying on asphalt, dazed but conscious,
half lay a spotted fawn, so scrawny that
I could not tell whether it had been struck
by hunger, illness, or accident. Over one eye
a slight cut, slightly bleeding. The fawn
blinked, lay still. Now other cars were halting.
Occupants were out, shouting advice.
The fawn reclined, dreamy and indifferent.
After a quarter hour of altercation
we heaved the passive, lally-legged baby
into a van, one of us holding a head
that did not need the holding, wary of
the hooves that did not move or strike,
and settled it inside a neighbor's barn
with a sheep-nipple, evaporated milk,
chlorate of lime, a bottle, barley-sugar.
Out of all these warm deer-milk was concocted
and fed into the fawn with deep resistance
from one so weak, so wild, so uncomplaining.
Blowing into the corner of her mouth
triggered a reflex that would make her suckle
and take enough to help her stay alive:
most of the milk ran down along her neck

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but some was kept. She lay with folded legs
unmoving, making no attempt to rise
when her feeders approached, not attempting
to give more than a sniff of cooperation.
The second day we took her from the barn
and fed her on the lawn. Her keeper let her go,
and suddenly she found her feet, making for open
country, so weak she could not navigate,
staggering sideways, legs scissoring.
Now, when we tried to put her in the barn
she flailed out at us with those edged hooves
and struggled till we feared not for ourselves
but her, that she might shatter against the wall.
The third and fourth days she was so much stronger
that her tail flicked up and down when she fed,
and she clattered back and forth in the dark stall.
We took her carefully into the sun,
fed her one last bottle, stood up and back,
and let her go. She walked, mincing forward,
then broke into a trot, and as we watched
she cantered down the lawn and onto the marsh,
tail held high, then out of view into the alders
that border on the marsh. There is no knowing
if she survived the winter, but it was a mild one.

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Things I Learned Last Week

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Ants, when they meet each other,
usually pass on the right.

Sometimes you can open a sticky
door with your elbow.

A man in Boston has dedicated himself
to telling about injustice.
For three thousand dollars he will
come to your town and tell you about it.

Schopenhauer was a pessimist but
he played the flute.

Yeats, Pound, and Eliot saw art as
growing from other art. They studied that.

If I ever die, I'd like it to be
in the evening. That way, I'll have
all the dark to go with me, and no one
will see how I begin to hobble along.

In the Pentagon one person's job is to
take pins out of towns, hills, and fields,
and then save the pins for later.

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Forgetting the Questions

The Problem of Educational Reform

DIANE RAVITCH

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND a sustained period of time in our history when Americans felt satisfied with the achievements of their schools. From the early nineteenth century on, it has been commonplace to find a fairly consistent recitation of complaints about the low state of learning, the poor training of teachers, the insufficient funding of education, the inadequacies of school buildings, and the apathy of the public. The temptation exists to attribute the concerns of the 1980s to this strain of despair about the historic gap between aspiration and reality, this sense that schools have always and will always fall short of their mission. But it would be wrong to do so, not only because it would encourage unwarranted complacency, but because the educational problems of the present are fundamentally different from those of the past.

One important difference is that so much of the past agenda of educational reformers has been largely fulfilled. In one sense, the educational enterprise is the victim of its own successes, since new problems have arisen from the long-sought solutions to earlier problems. Idealistic reformers, eager to improve the schools and to extend their promise to all children, sought the appropriate lever of change. *If only* teachers had college degrees and pedagogical training; *if only* teachers would band together to form a powerful teachers' union; *if only* there were federal aid to schools; *if only* all children were admitted to school regardless of race or national origin; *if only* all students of high ability were admitted to college; *if only* colleges could accommodate everyone who wanted to attend; *if only* students had more choices and fewer requirements in their course work; *if only* schools were open to educational experimentation; *if only* there were a federal department of education. . . . The "if only" list could be extended, but the point should be clear by now. All these "if onlies" have been put into effect, some entirely and others at

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least partially, and rarely have the results been equal to the hopes invested.

In reality, many present complaints are reactions to hard-won reforms of the past. Though the educational preparation of teachers is more extensive than ever, at least when measured by degrees and years of formal schooling, the education of teachers is still a subject of intense criticism. The realization has dawned in many quarters that a credential from a state university or a school of education is no guarantee that its bearer knows how to teach or what to teach, loves teaching or loves learning. Nor are today's critics delighted by the undeniable power of teachers' unions. True, the unions have used their political clout to improve teachers' salaries and to win vastly enlarged federal education expenditures, but unionization has not produced the educational changes that some of its advocates had anticipated. Similarly, the sense of achievement that should have followed the removal of racial barriers to higher education quickly gave way to concerns about social stratification, vocationalization, and declining quality. The reforms of the 1960s were effective, though not in the way that reformers had hoped. Now everyone who wants to go to college can go to *some* college, though not necessarily that of his first choice. By 1980, at least one-third of all institutions of higher education admitted everyone who applied, more than one-half accepted most or all of those who met their qualifications, and less than 10 percent were "competitive," that is, accepted only a portion of qualified applicants. As college enrollments decline, the number of competitive colleges will grow fewer. Curricular reforms have broken down the coherence of the liberal arts curriculum, both in high school and college, so that students have a wide degree of choice and few requirements. And a federal department of education has at last been established, though with what benefits or burdens for schools and children it is too soon to say.

Yet having won so many victories, some of truly historic dimension, American education is still embattled, still struggling to win public support and approval, and, perhaps worse, still struggling to find its own clear sense of purpose. Paradoxically, the achievements of the recent past seem to have exhausted the usually ready stock of prescriptions for school reform and to have raised once again the most basic questions of educational purpose.

Like other major institutions in our society, the schools are continually judged by today's demands and today's performance, and no credit is extended by clients or critics for yesterday's victories. Which is as it should be. School criticism, as I noted earlier, is nothing new. Behind any criticism, however, are assumptions about what schools should do and can do, and criticisms have shifted as assumptions about the goals

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and potentialities of schools have changed. Since the early nineteenth century, the tenor of school criticism has been essentially optimistic; no matter how despairing the critic, his working assumption has been that schools are valuable institutions, that they have within them the power to facilitate great social, moral, and political regeneration, and that more money, or more public concern, or better teachers could extend the promise of schooling to everyone. If more people had more schooling, critics have contended, and if schools were amply financed and well staffed, there would be enormous benefit to the individual, the society, the economy, and the body politic. With relatively little dissent, Americans have believed in schooling—not because of a love of the hickory stick and the three Rs, or (as some latter-day critics would have it) because of the schools' ability to make children docile workers, but because Americans are deeply committed to self-improvement and the school is an institutionalized expression of that commitment.

Participation in formal schooling has grown sharply in recent decades. The proportion of seventeen-year-olds who graduated from high school grew from about 50 percent in 1940 to about 85 percent in the late 1970s. Similarly, the proportion of young people who entered college climbed from about 16 percent in 1940 to about 45 percent in 1968, at which time it leveled off. In no other country in the world does participation in formal schooling last as long, for so many people, as in the United States. To understand why this broad democratization of educational participation occurred, as well as why the 1980s began on a note of disillusionment, it is useful to consider some of the expectations we have attached to formal schooling.

Until well into the twentieth century, only a small minority of Americans attended college. College was not only expensive but exclusive. Many, perhaps most, colleges maintained quotas for some groups (like Jews and Catholics) and excluded others altogether (blacks). After World War II, more than two million veterans attended college, crowding and sometimes overwhelming America's campuses. The GI Bill launched the world's first experiment in universal access to higher education. While most veterans did not use their benefits to attend college, the experience of those who did benefited the individuals, the institutions, and the economy. In light of the success and popularity of the GI program, the conviction that college should be a right rather than a privilege gained broad support.

While demands for expanded access to higher education grew steadily in the states and nation, other political forces combined to advance the role of education as a weapon against poverty. The notion that knowledge is power was certainly not novel, nor was the very American belief that schooling is an antidote to crime, poverty, and vice. The

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school promoters of the early nineteenth century repeatedly argued that schooling would give people the means to improve themselves and thereby break the cycle of poverty. During the early 1960s, this traditional rhetoric was given new life by scholars and policymakers. Educational programs burgeoned as an integral part of the federal government's war on poverty. Jacob Riis had written in 1892, "the more kindergartens, the fewer prisons"; in 1965 Lyndon Johnson predicted that the lives of children in the Head Start summer program would be spent "productively and rewardingly, rather than wasted in tax-supported institutions or in welfare-supported lethargy." The hope of eliminating poverty and inequality provided the major rationale not only for Operation Head Start but for general federal aid to education as well.

By the time the period of educational expansion reached a high tide in the middle 1960s, much was expected by a variety of publics. It was hoped that more education would:

- Reduce inequality among individuals and groups by eliminating illiteracy and cultural deprivation.
- Improve the economy and economic opportunity by raising the nation's supply of intelligence and skill.
- Spread capacity for personal fulfillment by developing talents, skills, and creative energies.
- Prove to be an uplifting and civilizing influence in the nation's cultural life by broadly diffusing the fruits of liberal education.
- Reduce alienation and mistrust while building a new sense of community among people of similar education and similar values.
- Reduce prejudice and misunderstanding by fostering contact among diverse groups.
- Improve the quality of civic and political life.

These hopes and expectations were a heavy burden for the schools to bear. Perhaps predictably, they did not accomplish all that was asked of them. Most of the problems that were laid at the schools' doors remained just as problematic years later (and some critics would argue that the provision of more schooling had produced the opposite effect in every instance). Poverty and inequality did not cease; their roots were elsewhere, and the schools were not able to cure deep-seated social and economic ills. While the disadvantaged received more schooling, so did the advantaged. Many poor youths entered the middle class by using educational opportunity, but others remained as poor as their parents. The value of a high school diploma declined not only because its possession became nearly universal but also, and most important, because high school graduates were not necessarily literate—mainly because of the well-intended effort to keep as many youths in school for as long as pos-

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sible and to deny no one a diploma, regardless of his educational development. Society's investment in education probably did spur economic development, but it did not prevent the emergence of skepticism about the desirability of economic growth; in fact, it was precisely among the educated (and the advantaged) that economic growth became suspect because of its association with the bureaucratization, centralization, and depersonalization of modern economic life. It is impossible to gauge the effects of increased schooling on popular culture or high culture. Television, which invariably seeks the largest possible audience, undoubtedly has more power to shape popular culture than schools do (a mixed blessing, since television disperses both sitcom pap and major cultural events to mass audiences). Participation in popular culture and high culture has surely been broadened, yet it is arguable whether the quality of either has been elevated during recent decades. Nor is it possible to demonstrate that increased educational participation has eliminated distrust between groups or contributed to a new sense of community. On the contrary, educational institutions have become settings for expression of militant particularism along racial, religious, ethnic, sexual, cultural, and linguistic lines. Very likely the differences among groups have been accentuated in the past twenty years. But again it would be difficult to hold the schools directly responsible for these trends. More likely, it appears, the schools are the stage on which such issues are acted out rather than the cause of their appearance. Nor can the schools claim to have improved the quality of political life, since political participation has waned along with public regard for political institutions. But, once again, it was not the schools that were responsible for the apparent ebbing of civic commitment and the surge of political apathy, nor could they even serve as a counterforce against such attitudes. The same attitudes of distrust, skepticism, hostility, and apathy eroded the schools' own status in the social order. The same confusions that pervaded the social atmosphere also pervaded the schools. If they failed to teach citizenship, it was at least in part because teachers and parents were confused about what a good citizen was and whether "citizenship" could be taught without imposing a partisan interpretation. In short, a society that is confused and contentious cannot look to its schools to straighten things out, for the schools will reflect the same confusion and contention.

In retrospect, it was folly to have expected the schools to transform society or to mold a new kind of person. The schools are by nature limited institutions, not total institutions. They do not have full power over their students' lives (even total institutions, like prisons, have discovered the difficulty of shaping or reshaping the lives and minds of those they fully control). Schools are not fully independent in their dealings with students; they are interrelated with, and dependent on, families,

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churches, the media, peer groups, and other agencies of influence. Nor can schools be considered as if they were machines, all operating in the same predictable manner. Teachers vary, administrators vary, students vary, communities vary, and therefore schools vary. The schools, being complex human institutions composed of actors with different goals, different interests, and different capacities, cannot be treated as if they were all interchangeable.

As it became clear that more schooling would not provide any magical solutions, the utopian hopes once focused on the schools dissipated. Having briefly been the repository of grand and even grandiose dreams of human betterment, the schools became a scapegoat for all the wide-ranging problems they had failed to solve. Having revealed that they were but fallible instruments of social change and that any change they promoted would only be incremental, the schools became the object of rage and scorn. They were portrayed as intractable, bureaucratic, even malevolent barriers to social change. But just as it was unrealistic to believe that the schools had the power to remake society by molding those who passed through their doors, it was equally unrealistic to assert that they were powerless, meaningless, superfluous institutions with no purpose other than the care and feeding of their own employees.

Nonetheless, when the dream of a school-led social revolution faded, school criticism shifted in tone. The voices of liberal critics—those who believed that men and women of goodwill might work together to improve schools by using this program or that curriculum—diminished to mere whispers. They were drowned out by critics who believed that only radical changes in teaching or in governing schools could "save" them; by those who believed that the public schools were beyond redemption and ought to be replaced by "free" schools; and by those who advocated the abolition of compulsory schooling and the "de-schooling" of society. For a time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, bookstore shelves fairly bulged with apocalyptic predictions about the imminent demise of schooling. One book, playing on the then current phrase "God is dead," was titled *School Is Dead.* While some of the writing of this period contained sharp and telling portraits of insensitive teachers and uncaring bureaucrats, others gave vent to undisguised anti-intellectualism in their attacks on academic standards, discipline, science, and rationality. In the larger culture—and, alas, especially in academic institutions—a great revival seemed to sweep the land, casting aside "old" doctrines of deferred gratification, structured learning, and professionalism while espousing mysticism, Eastern religions, the occult, astrology, and whatever else promised to touch the spontaneous, untrained inner spirit.

These trends had curricular and programmatic consequences. In colleges, students demanded, and usually won, the abolition of course re-

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quirements, the adoption of pass-fail grading, the de-emphasis of competition and testing, and extensive choice in selecting their own programs of study. As requirements for admission to college were relaxed, high schools soon succumbed to many of the same pressures that had changed the colleges: course requirements were eased, new courses proliferated, academic standards dropped, homework diminished, and adults generally relinquished their authority to direct student learning. At all levels, both in college and high school, educational administrators reduced, to the extent possible, the schools' role as in loco parentis. To some extent, this period of student assertiveness and adult retreat was the educational side of the movement against the war in Vietnam, which provoked youthful revolt against authority in many parts of the society and the culture. But even after the war ended, there remained a lingering hostility to science, technology, and reason—as though these were the root causes of the hated war.

As the 1980s opened, it appeared that this wave of anti-intellectualism had spent itself, for complaints about the schools suggested entirely different concerns. The well-publicized decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores created a context for worrying about a national deterioration in the quality of education. Not that the SAT scores were important in themselves, but they provided a sense of a pattern-in-the-carpet that had not previously been definable. For several years college officials had reported a steady increase in the number of freshmen who read poorly and wrote atrociously; the phenomenon of remedial reading and remedial writing classes spread throughout higher education, even to elite institutions. The apparent explanation, at first, was that so many new students from poor families had begun to attend college, but analysis of the SAT drop showed that the score decline continued long after the socio-economic profile of the college-going population had stabilized. Bits and pieces of evidence from other sources began to fit together. Other standardized measures of academic ability reported score declines paralleling the SAT's. National newsmagazines discovered a writing crisis and a literacy crisis. Educational malpractice suits were filed by disgruntled parents because their children had received a high school diploma in spite of being "functionally illiterate." The Council for Basic Education, a lonely voice for liberal education since its founding in 1958, found itself back in the educational mainstream, while still a lonely voice for liberal education. Demands for minimum competency tests seemed to spring up spontaneously in almost every state, though no national organization existed to promote or coordinate the movement. As concern for educational standards spread in the middle 1970s, demands for testing grew—not only minimum competency tests for high school graduation but tests at critical checkpoints in the lower grades

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and tests for would-be teachers. Reaction against these demands was not long in coming. The assault upon standardized testing was led by consumer activist Ralph Nader and the National Education Association. Nader released a lengthy attack on the credibility of the SAT, the most widely used college admission test, and lobbied successfully in New York State and elsewhere for passage of a "truth-in-testing" law.

While it did generate controversy, the dispute over testing was superficial, for tests were neither a cause of nor a remedy for the underlying malaise in American education. Nearly all the educational controversies of the 1970s—whether over bilingualism or sex education or testing or open admissions or busing—dealt with some aspect of the educational process that was of great importance to some constituency, but none directly raised these questions: What does it mean to be an educated person? What knowledge is of most worth? Are the graduates of our schools educated people?

The very absence of such questioning suggests a failure in educational thinking. Educators and, most especially, educational policymakers have fallen into the habit of analyzing school issues almost entirely in sociological and economic terms. In recent years it has been customary to think of schooling as a quantifiable economic good to be distributed in accordance with principles of equity or in response to political demands. The sociological-economic perspective has come to dominate educational discussion and has informed public policy. Without doubt it has contributed to necessary changes in patterns of schooling, by redirecting resources in a fair manner and by opening up access to educational opportunities. But the functionalist perspective became dysfunctional when it crowded substantive educational concerns off the policymakers' agenda, when the desire to keep students in school was unaccompanied by interest in what they would learn while they stayed in school. What I am suggesting here is not a conflict between the functionalist perspective and the educational perspective, but the danger of analyzing the schools through only one of the two prisms. There has been a fairly persistent tendency, I would argue, to neglect the role of schools as educational institutions, to treat them as sociological cookie cutters without regard to the content of their educational program. When I consider why this is so, I conclude that there are several possible explanations.

First, the sociological perspective has become dominant because it relies on quantifiable data that are accessible. It is far easier to gain information about years of educational attainment and socio-economic status than it is to ascertain the conditions of learning in any given school. Educators cannot agree on how to ascertain the educational climate or even on what should be learned. Thus it becomes irresistible to

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deal with, perhaps even become the captive of, data that are both available and measurable.

Second, the sociological perspective is a useful adjunct to the concept of the school as a tool of social reform. By checking on who is in school and for how many years, and on how their social background relates to their choice of occupation, we can attempt to monitor how educational resources are allocated and whether schooling is contributing to social progress. While it is neither new nor unusual to regard the school as a lever of social reform, it is unusual and perhaps unwise to see the school *solely* as a tool of social reform and *solely* as a resource to be redistributed. One consequence is that the school's diploma is confused with the learning that it is supposed to represent. In recent years, policymakers have sought to equalize educational attainment (years-of-schooling) without regard to the quality of education. This is like putting people on a diet of eighteen hundred calories a day without caring whether they are consuming junk food or nutritious food. Years-of-schooling, or a diploma, has been treated as an end in itself. Thus we have seen courts require school districts to present a diploma to students who could not meet minimum state standards of literacy, as if it was the diploma itself they needed rather than the learning that the diploma is supposed to signify. When school reformers in the nineteenth century advocated universal education as a way of improving society, they meant a broad diffusion of knowledge and wisdom, not a broad diffusion of diplomas.

Third, educational analysts have relied on the sociological perspective because it is easier to raise the level of educational attainment than it is to raise the level of educational quality. Staying in school, not dropping out, and getting a diploma represent a clear, unambiguous goal that everyone can understand without quarrel. As soon as school officials begin to define what should be taught and learned during those years, disagreements arise which are best settled by making the schools all things for all people.

For these reasons and others, educational policymakers have tended to view schooling as an instrument to achieve some other goal, only rarely as an end in itself. To the extent that they do so, they rob schooling of the very attributes that give it power. If a young man or woman has a high school diploma but can scarcely read or write, then the diploma is worthless. When a diploma, either at the high school or college level, represents a certificate of time served but not of the systematic development of intelligence and skill, then it is difficult to know why it should have any inherent value. And of course it does not.

An educational critique of schooling would have as its starting point, I believe, the idea that the essential purpose of schooling is to develop the powers of intelligence: thinking, reflecting, observing, imagining, ap-

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preciating, questioning, and judging. Beyond that, schooling has many additional purposes and serves many additional purposes, both for the student and for society. Educational literature teems with lists of the many ways in which schools should meet individual and social needs. But the schools' first purpose is to encourage and guide each person in the cultivation of intelligence and the development of talents, interests, and abilities. Schools do many other things as well; they may provide food, social services, psychological services, medical care, and career guidance. But no matter how well or how poorly they fulfill these functions, the schools must be judged in the first instance by how well they do those things that only they can do. We expect the schools to teach children command of the fundamental skills that are needed to continue learning—in particular, the ability to read, write, compute, speak, and listen. Once they have command of these skills, they should progress through a curriculum designed to enlarge their powers. Such a curriculum would contain, for every student, history and social studies, language and literature, mathematics, science, and the arts. Students need to learn these skills and disciplines in school because, except for those rare individuals who can educate themselves without a teacher, they are unlikely to have another chance to do so.

The schools are responsible both for preserving a sense of the past and for providing the ability to think about, and function in, the present and the future. More than any other educational agency, they ought to have an intelligent understanding of the inexorable connection between past, present, and future. Certainly there is disagreement about the meaning of the past and how it relates to the present and the future, and awareness of such disagreement is often invoked to justify educational aimlessness. But much of what seems to be dissension is a chimera; democratic debate ought not to be confused with chaos, nor should pluralistic politics be confused with anarchy. Education proceeds from widely shared values, and we do, in fact, have widely shared values. We may not agree about how democracy is to be achieved and about whether we have too much or too little of it, but few would question the idea that each person has the right as a citizen to participate in the shaping of public issues. We believe in the idea of self-government and in the greatest possible involvement of citizens as voters, as volunteers in community organizations, as members of interest groups, and as spokesmen for different views. While we may differ over particular educational issues, there is general support for the idea that schooling is a necessary mechanism for achieving society's goals: to prepare the younger generation to be thoughtful citizens; to enable each person to appreciate and contribute to the culture; to sharpen the intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities for lifelong enjoyment; to develop readiness for the educational, occupa-

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tional, and professional choices that each person will confront; to kindle a sense of responsibility for others and a sense of integrity; to teach children how to lead and how to follow; and to acquaint young people with the best models of achievement in every field while encouraging them to strive to realize their own potential.

If these are widely shared educational aims, and I believe they are, then none of them should be left to chance. The curriculum should be designed so that every student has the fullest opportunity to develop his powers, intelligence, interests, talent, and understanding. Every student needs to know how to form and formulate his own opinions. To do so, he must learn how to read critically, how to evaluate arguments, how to weigh evidence, and how to reach judgments on his own. Every student, to understand the world in which he will be a participant, should be knowledgeable about history; should master some other language as well as his own; should discover the pleasures of literature, especially its power to reach across time and cultures and to awaken our sense of universality; should study science and technology, both as a citizen who will be asked to comprehend complex issues and as an individual who must live with constant change. Since we believe that everyone should be equally concerned about the problems of our society, then we must believe that everyone, every student, should be schooled in a way that meets his need to know history, science, mathematics, language, the arts, literature, and so on. And yet it is not simply on the grounds of utility, relevance, and political value that the case for liberal education rests. We do not need to know how to read Shakespeare; we can be good citizens without any knowledge of Athenian civilization, even though our concept of citizenship is based on the very period of which we are ignorant. We must concern ourselves with the survival of history, philosophy, literature, and those other disciplines that may lack immediate utility because without them ours would be an intellectually impoverished and spiritually illiterate civilization.

To some people, all this is so self-evident that it ought not be necessary to plead for the value of an education of substance and content. Yet it is necessary, because of the widespread disarray in high school and college curricula. In the face of changes that have occurred in the past decade or so, many educators seem unable to remember how to justify or defend or champion liberal education. The proposition that all students should be subject to curricular requirements that define the essentials of a good education has become controversial, rather than a starting point in defining the nature of a good curriculum.

Confronted with conflicting demands from those who want reduced requirements and those who want curricular substance, many schools have resolved the dilemma by reducing requirements while expanding

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electives. Thus students may take history courses to meet their minimal graduation requirement, but may choose history courses that are little more than classes in current events. Or they may meet their English requirement by reading popular fiction, mystery stories, and science fiction. There is no harm in what is included; from the perspective of a liberal education, what is unfortunate is the wide body of knowledge that is excluded when course proliferation and lax requirements are joined together. Professors regularly encounter students who are ignorant of anything that happened before the Civil War as well as anything that happened, or was written, outside the United States. They may have heard of Plato and Aristotle in a survey course, but they have never read anything written by either and have only a dim notion (usually wrong) of what they "stood for." Mention Dickens, Tolstoy, Conrad, or Melville, and they have heard of them too, but they "didn't take that course." Some professors who teach literature have been astonished to find students who know nothing of mythology or the Bible; allusions to Job or Icarus must be explained to those who have no intellectual furniture in their minds, no stock of literary or historical knowledge on which to draw beyond their immediate experience. In a recent issue of *Commonweal*, J. M. Cameron soberly observes that if Freud attended school today, he might not be able to think up the Oedipus theory because he would not have enough mythology in his head to do so. We seem now to turn to television or the movies to teach the history and literature that were neglected in school. To permit knowledge to be fragmented, as we have, by serving it up cafeteria-style, with each person choosing whether to be minimally literate or to be a specialist, contributes to the diminution and degradation of the common culture.

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The Career of Isaac Newton

A Scientific Life in the Seventeenth Century

RICHARD S. WESTFALL

IF ANYONE HAS HAD A GOOD PRESS among the scientific community, surely it is Isaac Newton. He has appeared as the archetype of the modern empirical scientist, the example on which the majority of contemporary scientists would happily model themselves. It is not surprising that Newton should have assumed this role. In his *Principia* he produced the paradigm of the scientific world view. The law of universal gravitation was almost the least of its contents. Its three laws of motion, still presented today at the beginning of any introduction to physics, provided the foundation of a general science of mechanics. The work also presented the ideal of science as exact mathematical description, not confined to ideal situations as mathematical descriptions had been in earlier works such as those of Galileo, but exact descriptions of the extent to which physical reality fails to embody the ideal. In his other great work, *Opticks*, Newton produced one of the earliest exemplars of experimental procedure. Finally, he capped the whole performance with the invention of calculus, the basic instrument of physical science. It was, all in all, an achievement without equal—one indeed without serious rival. More than any other single man, Newton defined what modern science would be.

The case for Newton as the archetype of the empirical scientist extends beyond his achievement in science. Throughout his career he consistently expressed a methodological point of view to which most contemporary scientists would readily subscribe. The first occasion for such utterance came soon after he burst upon the scientific scene, in 1672, with his paper on colors. The paper contained an experimental investigation that established the heterogeneity of light. It was laid before a community convinced by a tradition some two thousand years old, which common sense supported, that primary light—the light of the sun—is homogeneous and that colors appear in certain circumstances, such as rainbows, when media modify primary light. Influenced as well

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by the mechanical philosophy of nature, the audience who read his paper looked for mechanistic explanations that would explain both the modification light undergoes and the nature of colors.

Not surprisingly, they misunderstood Newton's paper. In reply to their criticism, he took a methodological stand. In science, he insisted, experimental investigations must take precedence over explanatory hypotheses devised to explain phenomena. "For if the possibility of hypotheses is to be the test of the truth and reality of things, I see not how certainty can be obtained in any science; since numerous hypotheses may be devised, which shall seem to overcome new difficulties." "The proper Method for inquiring after the properties of things," he added, in another letter, "is to deduce them from Experiments. And I told you that the Theory w^{ch} I propounded was evinced by me, *not by inferring tis thus because not otherwise,* that is not by deducing it onely from the confutation of contrary suppositions, but *by deriving it from Experiments concluding positively & directly.* The way therefore to examin it is by considering whether the experiments w^{ch} I propound do prove those parts of the Theory to w^{ch} they are applyed, or by prosecuting other experiments w^{ch} the Theory may suggest for its examination."

More than forty years later, when he was well past his seventieth year, Newton asserted the same position to distinguish himself from Leibniz. "The Philosophy which Mr. Newton in his *Principles* and *Optiques* has pursued is Experimental," he stated, referring to himself in the third person; "and it is not the Business of Experimental Philosophy to teach the Causes of things any further than they can be proved by Experiments. We are not to fill this Philosophy with Opinions which cannot be proved by Phaenomena. In this Philosophy Hypotheses have no place, unless as Conjectures or Questions proposed to be examined by Experiments. . . . And . . . one would wonder that Mr. Newton should be reflected upon for not explaining the Causes of Gravity and other Attractions by Hypotheses; as if it were a crime to content himself with Certainties and let Uncertainties alone." In his own age, this was a stance that differed from the prevailing one. It is, in general terms, the one modern science has adopted, and it is small wonder that Newton is seen by contemporary scientists as the archetype of the experimental, empirical scientist.

How familiar he looks, from a distance. Up close and examined in detail, how completely strange Newton's career appears—a career so unlike what we now take for granted that we would hardly recognize it as a career in science were we not convinced a priori that it must have been. "The past is like a foreign country," a character in the movie *The Go-Between* remarked, "they do things differently there." Certainly they pursued science differently in the seventeenth century. Three features of Newton's career—three important features which differ profoundly from

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the normal career of a twentieth-century scientist who sees Newton as his model—illustrate how foreign the past indeed was.

Physical isolation is the first feature distinguishing past from present. People familiar with Newton's life are apt to object to such a characterization. He was, after all, President of the Royal Society for the final twenty-three years of his life and a fellow of the Society for nearly thirty-two years before that. Newton's relationship to the Royal Society can be misleading if it is not closely inspected. When he assumed its presidency, he had passed well beyond his age of scientific creativity; and during the earlier period when he was a fellow, he lived far away, separated from its activities and its members by sixty miles of impossible roads. With only the smallest exceptions, all of Newton's creative work, all of what we remember him for today, stemmed from his Cambridge years. Physical isolation characterized him in his Cambridge setting; it is necessary to understand him in that context.

Of Newton's isolation, it is hard to distinguish between factors that were purely personal and factors that were general and, therefore, offer some insight into scientific life in his day. Newton was a born recluse if ever one existed. As early as grammar school he found it difficult to get along with fellow students. It did not become any easier at the university, and his isolation only increased when he proceeded to a fellowship in Trinity College. It is striking that only one personal letter from Newton to one of his peers in Trinity exists, and there is some doubt that it was ever mailed. No letters at all from one of them to him is known. He was hardly mentioned by those who reflected on college life during the period when he was a fellow—this despite the fact that he had become the leading intellectual of the land by the time the reflections were set down.

Newton's strange and bizarre habits were the lone characteristics recorded about him. When he set out for dinner in the Hall, he would sometimes take the wrong turn, go out through the gate into the town, and then, when he realized something was wrong, return to his room rather than the Hall. When he did make it to dinner, he was apt to show up disheveled, dressed in the wrong gown, and then to sit there silently, lost in thought, while the meal remained on his plate uneaten. This last habit—about which a number of stories have come down—appeared an excessive peculiarity to the age. Cambridge was at that time going through a disastrous decline. Its dons, who no longer believed in the mission of the university and treated their fellowships as freeholds to be exploited for their personal benefit, happily surrendered to the attractions of the plate and the bottle, becoming, in the splendid phrase of Roger North, wet epicures. They found Newton quite impossible to comprehend. He lived in Trinity College thirty-five years from the time of his

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admission as an undergraduate. During that time he did not form any close friendships except with his chamber fellow Wickins, and that relationship ended with a breach. After he left, Newton did not exchange a single personal letter with anyone he had known there, and he never returned to Cambridge for any purpose other than electioneering for a university seat in Parliament.

Even though all of the above is true, we can still not ignore the intellectual dimension of Newton's isolation. As an undergraduate he deliberately cut himself off from the established curriculum in order to pursue his own interests: mathematics, as he found it in the writings of Wallis, Viète, and Descartes; and the new natural philosophy, as he found it in Descartes, Galileo, Gassendi, and others. In following this course, Newton very nearly destroyed his prospects. If he wished to remain in the university, where alone he could have pursued the intellectual life from which his achievement sprang, he had to be elected to a scholarship in Trinity College. A scholarship was the necessary preliminary to a fellowship, and since he was a student in Trinity, a Trinity fellowship was the only one to which he could aspire. Even under the best of circumstances, the odds against a sizar (a student who supported himself by performing menial tasks in the college) were enormous. Every year approximately half the scholarships were reserved for a privileged clique of students from Westminster School. The younger sons and clients of powerful men secured most of the rest. The possibilities for Newton, a strange young man without evident connections and from a remote village in Lincolnshire, were hardly great.

Nevertheless, sometime less than a year before the election of 1664, the only one at which he would be eligible, Newton chose to throw over the established curriculum in order to pursue his own line of interests. There is a story, told by Newton in his old age, that he was sent to be examined in mathematics by Isaac Barrow. At this time Newton had mastered Descartes' geometry and was beginning to move beyond it toward his own discoveries. Barrow examined him on Euclid, however, and formed, as Newton recalled it, a tepid opinion of his knowledge of mathematics. Nevertheless, luck was on Newton's side. He was, in fact, not entirely without connections. Among the most senior fellows in the college was one Humphrey Babington, who not only hailed from Newton's corner of Lincolnshire but was the brother of the woman with whom he had boarded in Grantham. It appears likely that Babington was instrumental in his election. Although his early studies did not finally exclude him from a fellowship, his continuing interest in such things always formed a barrier that separated him from the rest of the college. One of Newton's strange habits, as they were later remembered, was a tendency to draw geometric diagrams in the walks of the fellows' gar-

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den. The other fellows were awed as much as they were amused by their strange compatriot, and they carefully walked around the diagrams in order not to disturb them. It is not known if another fellow ever stopped to study them.

Within a year and a half of taking his bachelor's degree, Newton had invented calculus and recorded it in a definitive tract in the notebook that he called his Waste Book. By every indication we have, Newton carried out his education in mathematics and his program of research entirely on his own. At the time, as far as we know, no one at all was aware of his achievement. It was his isolation that set the stage for the destructive conflict with Leibniz half a century later, for initially Newton's accomplishments were not known to anyone, and during the following two decades they were known only within a small circle gathered around John Collins, the London mathematical enthusiast.

By the late 1660s, one man, Isaac Barrow, the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, had become acquainted with Newton's work. As it happened, Barrow was then preparing to vacate the mathematics chair, and he secured Newton's nomination to succeed him. For his initial lectures, Newton chose the subject of optics, and the lectures served to emphasize his isolation anew. He had discovered a new property of one of the major phenomena of nature: the heterogeneity of light. Not only was the discovery unknown to anyone, but when he presented it in three series of lectures, they were as unknown as the discovery itself. There is no testimony of any kind that a single listener heard and understood what the new Lucasian Professor was presenting.

Optics did bring Newton's complete isolation to an end, however. His theory of colors had led him to the idea of a reflecting telescope to eliminate chromatic aberration, and he was proud enough of the telescope to show it around. Eventually the Royal Society in London heard about it and asked to see it, and ultimately Newton sent them a paper on his theory of colors early in 1672.

The moment Newton ended his isolation, he discovered how much he preferred it. His paper stimulated a modest number of questions and objections which he found it necessary to answer, and he quickly came to resent the intrusion on his time. Thus Newton was no sooner brought into communication with the scientific community, both of Britain and of Europe, than he wanted to sever the connection. He did finally succeed in doing so to a considerable degree and lived mostly in renewed isolation during the decade from the mid-1670s to the mid-1680s. He reinforced his isolation by turning almost entirely away from his studies in mathematics and physics to devote himself to alchemy and theology.

Newton's extraordinary intellectual capacity had become known, however, and letters intermittently intruded upon his isolation. In Au-

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gust 1684, he received a visit from Edmund Halley. We must not overestimate the personal contact that resulted from the visit. Halley put one question to Newton: What would be the shape of the orbit followed by a planet moving in an inverse square force field? That question and all that it implied grasped Newton's attention and refused to let it go. It stimulated the process from which, two and a half years later, the *Principia* emerged. Once more the composition was carried out in isolation. Halley retired to London after he posed his question, made only two brief visits to Cambridge during the following thirty months, and refrained from imposing a burden of correspondence on Newton. The period between his visit and the completion of the manuscript constitutes the largest gap in our knowledge of Newton's adult life, for he had cut himself off from every contact in order to work out the consequences of his ideas alone. The investigation culminated in the book that, by its impact on the scientific world, ended his isolation once and for all. By 1687, however, Newton stood only a few years from the end of his creative intellectual activity, and nearly everything which has made his name immortal had already been accomplished.

Significant personal elements figured in Newton's isolation. He was reclusive by nature. In the early 1670s, after Barrow made Collins aware of Newton's mathematical abilities, Newton consented to Collins's publication of a solution to the annuity problem that he had written only if his, Newton's, name was left off. "It would perhaps increase my acquaintance," he told Collins, "y^{e} thing w^{ch} I cheifly study to decline." Nevertheless, the issue stretches far beyond the limits of a personal idiosyncracy. With whom could he have communicated had he not been a recluse? In Britain there were perhaps four men: John Wallis of the previous generation; James Gregory and Christopher Wren of his own; and Edmund Halley of the following. All, for various reasons, would have been less than ideal collaborators. In the rest of Europe, Newton had indeed two scientific peers, Christiaan Huygens and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Obviously, as such a list implies, we deal here in part with the problem of genius, which is in short supply everywhere always. The short supply of genius does not exhaust the issue, however. The brevity of the list serves to remind us of what we too readily forget, that modern science was created in the seventeenth century by the philosophic rebellion of a tiny handful of men.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, these men were becoming numerous enough to form the first scientific societies. We need to remember how small those societies were. The *Académie Royale des Sciences* in Paris was created in 1666 with sixteen members to cover the entire range of scientific endeavor. The Royal Society in London was a popular organization instead of an exclusive one, and it became for a

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time a fad in London society, so that its membership swelled to around two hundred. While even two hundred is not an imposing number, it is still misleading as a guide to the size of the English scientific community. It is instructive to listen in briefly on a typical meeting of the Royal Society in the 1690s. John Van de Bembde solemnly informed the society that "cows piss drank to about a pint, will either purge or vomit with great Ease." You may think that he was summarily ejected, whether for indelicacy or irrelevancy. Not at all. The membership seized on the remark as the opportunity for a general discussion of bovine elixir, which was clearly the most stimulating part of the meeting. If we focus, not on the total membership of the Royal Society, but on the number of working scientists in its ranks, we find fewer than the sixteen that made up the Royal Academy. Relative isolation was an unavoidable aspect of the scientific revolution. Newton's reclusive habits only reinforced what would have been his lot in any case.

Physical isolation was of course not equivalent to intellectual isolation. Through the printed page, kindred spirits of more than one locale and more than one age could communicate with one another. Unencumbered as he was with endless committees, colloquia, and consultations, the seventeenth-century scientist had the opportunity to attend carefully to the printed page and to wrestle earnestly with what it presented. It may have been a more effective form of communication than the plethora of immediate contacts in which contemporary scientists of all sorts struggle desperately to preserve some sense of sustained endeavor.

A second distinctive feature of Newton's career was its philosophic breadth. By that phrase I mean to indicate the constant concern in his scientific work more with the total philosophy of nature than with the specific results of immediate investigations. Once again, those familiar with Newton are likely to object. *Opticks*, an experimental investigation of the heterogeneity of light and of the periodicity of some phenomena, especially appears to belie such a characterization. But, in response to the objection, let me call attention first of all to the *Principia*. The *Principia* presented more than the law of universal gravitation, and more than a new science of dynamics which entailed universal gravitation. What it presented, and consciously so, was a new philosophy of nature based on the principle of forces. "I wish we could derive the rest of the phenomena of Nature by the same kind of reasoning from mechanical principles," Newton stated in the preface, with reference to his explanation of the solar system from the concept of gravitational attraction, "for I am induced by many reasons to suspect that they may all depend upon certain forces by which the particles of bodies, by some causes hitherto unknown, are either mutually impelled towards one another, and cohere in regular figures, or are repelled and recede from one

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another. These forces being unknown, philosophers have hitherto attempted the search of Nature in vain; but I hope the principles here laid down will afford some light either to this or some truer method of philosophy."

During the years that immediately followed the publication of the *Principia*, when Newton first put the *Opticks* together, he treated the work primarily as an exposition of the new philosophy in which he used optical phenomena further to demonstrate the existence of forces in nature. True, in the end, apparently to avoid controversy, he eliminated most of these features, so that the work he eventually published confined such matters mostly, though not entirely, to the Queries at the work's close. Nevertheless, he always saw his scientific work as so many aspects of a new natural philosophy, and the considerable number of followers who wrote popular versions of it in the early eighteenth century all presented it in such terms.

To appreciate this facet of Newton, it is necessary to comprehend his historical situation. When Newton enrolled in Cambridge in 1661, he was educated in a natural philosophy that was more than two thousand years old. The universities of medieval Europe had built themselves in the Aristotelian system. It was still being taught, and not only in Cambridge, when Newton began his university education. In England the Parliamentary statutes that prescribed the curricula of the universities required the study of Aristotle. Newton's first step in natural science was to rebel against the established Aristotelian philosophy and to embrace a new one. The rebellion coincided with his rejection of the standard curriculum, which I mentioned earlier. He was still an undergraduate. Somehow he had found the writings of the men of the previous generation who had offered a radical new approach to nature—among them, Descartes, Gassendi, and Hobbes. Historians call their philosophy (for they agreed on a common core of principles despite their differences on many details) the mechanical philosophy. It provided the intellectual framework of the scientific revolution. Although he did not date his notes, it was apparently in 1664 that Newton embraced the mechanical philosophy and in doing so inaugurated his scientific career.

He did not embrace it for long, however, for he quickly became dissatisfied with aspects of the mechanical philosophy. His dissatisfaction rested partly on religious grounds. Mechanical philosophers proposed, or appeared to propose, the autonomy of the material realm, and Newton decided that such was a program for atheism. In his revulsion, he found in alchemy a concept of nature more in harmony with the demands of religion, and alchemy was one of Newton's major enterprises during the years of silence before the *Principia*.

Alchemy is not a popular topic in many circles. Even to bring it up is

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to raise doubts in some minds that one is competent to talk about science at all. Newton's alchemical manuscripts are nevertheless authentic. There can be no doubt that he did devote himself to alchemy, and quite extensively. If the goal of history, including the history of science, is to present the past in its own terms to the best of our ability, and not merely to present it as a pale anticipation of the twentieth century, we cannot afford to ignore Newton's immersion in alchemy. We especially cannot afford to ignore its influence on his philosophy of nature, for it appears to have been primarily alchemy that led Newton toward the concept of forces.

The idea of forces was not a single, limited concept; it turned out in the end to involve the entire philosophy of nature. From the beginning, Newton's disenchantment with standard mechanical philosophy had not been solely religious. Mechanical philosophies generated an abundance of talk about the invisible mechanisms by which nature produces phenomena, but their mechanical models proved incapable of yielding exact quantitative results. The great advantage of forces in Newton's eyes was exactly their capacity to generate such results. As he contemplated their import, they promised to revise every corner of natural philosophy. Descartes had argued that nature is a plenum; although atomists rejected the plenum, they nevertheless thought of a universe well filled with matter mixed with dispersed voids. Newton depopulated the universe of matter as he filled it with forces. As he finally conceived of it, nature was an infinite void seasoned with the merest suggestion of solid matter. For example, he paid careful attention to the implications of relative densities. Gold, he argued, cannot be absolutely dense since thin leaves of gold are translucent. He assumed for the moment that gold is made up half of solid matter and half of voids. Gold is nineteen times denser than water; water therefore can contain only one-thirty-eighth part of solid matter. In fact, he continued, water must contain far less solid matter than that, for water readily transmits rays of light in straight lines at every angle. Water in turn cannot be compressed. Newton ended up with a picture of matter in the form of tenuous nets composed of punctiform particles held together by forces, and eighteenth-century Newtonians would argue that all of the solid matter in the universe could fit inside a nutshell.

Method was involved in the change as much as in the system of nature; the statement on method quoted above comes from a passage on his natural philosophy. Most general of all, his position embodied a new ideal of science as the exact mathematical description both of ideal patterns in nature and of the extent to which material embodiments deviate from the ideal. Even his conception of the relation of God to the physical universe was involved. The dispute with Leibniz over priority in the discovery of calculus, a dispute which reached its climax during the second

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decade of the eighteenth century, was equally a debate about the philosophy of nature in which all of the above issues were enmeshed.

Moreover, philosophic breadth was not a characteristic unique to Newton. Its greatest interest lies in the fact that it was not. To be sure, Newton may have been of a more contemplative spirit than the average scientist of his time. Despite his reputation as an empirical scientist, he was perhaps the greatest speculator of the age. His meditations on the nature of things, ruminations that extended throughout the length of his career, furnished the warp on which he wove the fabric of his career in science. His concept of forces was only the most fruitful of a long series of speculations. Nevertheless, every member of the scientific community of the age, of necessity, also concerned himself with the philosophy of nature. Virtually without exception, they had been educated like Newton in the Aristotelian philosophy, and like him they had all gone through their own personal rebellions against it. Such was the very meaning of the mechanical philosophy—a new beginning, a determination to reshape natural philosophy according to new principles. In the early eighteenth century, in turn, no one could stand aloof from the controversy that separated Newtonian natural philosophy from the prevailing forms of the mechanical philosophy. It was precisely in this feature that Newton most diverged from the image of the archetype of the modern empirical scientist. It is indeed a distortion of language to call him a scientist at all. In his own eyes, he was a natural philosopher.

A third prominent feature of Newton's career was his theological depth. No one familiar with Newton is likely to protest against this, for Newton's religious concerns are well known. The General Scholium to the *Principia*, to cite only one example, hymns a rhapsody to God. "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. . . . This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all; and on account of his dominion He is wont to be called *Lord God, pantokrator*, or *Universal Ruler*. . . . We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things, and final causes; we admire him for his perfections; but we reverence and adore him on account of his dominion. . . . " "When I wrote my treatise about our Systeme," he wrote to Richard Bentley, "I had an eye upon such Principles as might work wth considering men for the beleife of a Deity. . . . "

These passages and similar ones are well known. They do not, however, constitute Newton's theological depth. They are evidence, rather, of his personal piety. To find the theological depth we must turn to his private papers instead of his published works, to papers fully opened to public scrutiny only within the last decade. They reveal that Newton plunged into serious and sustained theological study in the early 1670s—

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not in his old age as is usually assumed, but during the full flower of his early manhood, when he was approaching the age of thirty. Together with alchemy, theology constituted the primary substance of his intellectual life from that time until the composition of the *Principia.* The Bible supplied part of his reading; Newton's extensive knowledge of it, which John Locke said was equaled by few whom he knew, undoubtedly derived from the intense study of this period. The Bible was by no means the only object of his attention. He took up the early fathers of the church and read and digested the writings of every father of any significance. He turned to the prophecies and invested immense energy in an interpretation of them. To be sure that he had the correct text of the Book of Revelation, he collated more than twenty versions of the Greek text. Since he regarded the prophecies as the core of the Bible and the key to the rest, he combed the Scriptures for supporting passages; and since he insisted on an exact correlation between prophecy and history, he devoted equal zeal to the history of the early Christian centuries. The prophecies took him into the study of Judaism. As part of that study he became interested in the plan of the Jewish temple. Newton was never interested in things only in a general way. He wanted to know the exact plan of the temple, and for that purpose he reconstructed four chapters of Ezekiel while he drew a detailed plan of the temple to accompany the text.

In such activities one may begin to sense the measure of Newton's theological depth. They do not yet indicate the full depth, however. Behind all his study of theology was a fundamental goal—an anguished reassessment of the whole Christian tradition. The initial stimulus to his theological reading was probably the requirement that bore upon Fellows of Trinity College to be ordained to the Anglican clergy within seven years of taking their M.A. degrees. Almost the first result of Newton's study was an impassable obstacle to ordination, for he quickly convinced himself that the dominant Christian tradition, Trinitarianism, was false. The doctrine of the Trinity, he believed, was more than false; it was a deliberate fraud foisted onto the church in the fourth century by deceitful and evil men pursuing their own selfish interests. Newton adopted the ancient belief of Arianism as his own theological position, a position that denied the full divinity of Christ. Trinitarianism stood at the center of his interpretation of the prophecies. It was the Great Apostacy foretold by God when men would fall away from the true worship into idolatry; the plagues and vials of wrath of the Apocalypse, corresponding to the barbarian invasions of the empire, were God's punishment on a stiff-necked people who had gone whoring after false gods. In a word, Newton was one of the more advanced heretics of his day. His constant concern to conceal opinions which would have led to ostracism,

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first from the university, and later from the government's service, furnished a basic theme throughout his life. The piety of the General Scholium was sincere. No one should question it. Nevertheless it concealed a reality more complicated than has generally been realized.

This feature of Newton's career was also a general characteristic of the age. The constant references to God and to Christianity in the writings of scientists, like those of Newton, are usually taken as testimonies to the piety of the age. They derived rather from the fact that traditional piety had been called into question. Basil Willey has referred to the seventeenth century's "touch of cold philosophy." It had dissipated the enchanted world of medieval Christianity before the very eyes of scientists like Newton. They were unable to ignore this fact of their existence, as unsettling a piece of reality as one can readily imagine. Not many followed Newton into heterodoxy, but the endless refutations of atheism and proofs of the existence of God with which they filled their books adequately testify that they were aware of the same motives that animated Newton's lifelong inquiry into the true religion. When Robert Boyle died in 1691, after soundly refuting atheism at least fifty times, he left part of his fortune to endow a series of lectures. What were the lectures to do? Refute atheism still more. When during the previous thousand years of Western history had anyone thought that was necessary? Thinkers of the late seventeenth century knew only too well that the ground on which Christianity stood was shifting. In one way or another, most of them took account of the new circumstances. Many things contributed to Willey's touch of cold philosophy, but the birth of modern science was not the least among its sources. No wonder theological depth was a common feature of scientists (or natural philosophers) such as Newton.

Let us now turn the three chief characteristics of Newton's career back on ourselves and use them as a yardstick to measure the contemporary scientific community. No one, I suspect, would suggest that physical isolation is a normal feature of a twentieth-century scientist. Every year throughout the Western and Communist worlds there are meetings, such as those of the AAAS, where thousands of scientists come together; increasingly they are spreading into the third world as well. I teach at Indiana University, a distinguished institution but not, in the opinion of any informed judge, a leading center of contemporary science. Nevertheless, the scientific community at Indiana University is larger than the whole of Europe could have mustered at any time during the seventeenth century. There are several other groups of equal size in the state of Indiana and well over fifty centers in the state where scientists can be and are in immediate contact with trained and interested colleagues. This situation is also normal throughout the Western and Communist worlds. When one adds to the scientists the considerable army of techni-

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cal experts called into being by modern science—an army which had no counterpart in the seventeenth century—the scientific community emerges as a significant portion of the working population. The small handful of natural philosophers who created the scientific revolution has burgeoned into a sociological phenomenon of immense scope.

As for philosophic breadth, it is no longer required. It is true of some contemporary scientists; it is not required of any one—that is, it is no longer necessary for every scientist constantly to consider the fundamental issues of natural philosophy. Although our century has witnessed a profound revision of the conception of nature, virtually no one in the scientific community considers that the system as a whole is in serious question, and it is perfectly proper for scientists to ignore the problems that occupied Newton in order to work at clarifying details of the system. Thus a typical issue of the *Physical Review* contains articles on "Three-body Lippmann-Schwinger Equations," "Influence of Vibrations of Gas Molecules on Neutron Reaction Cross Sections," "Core Coupled States in ^{145}Eu," and "Decays of Mass-separated ^{139}Xe and ^{139}Cs," together with many more in a similar vein. The articles all assume the existence of a coherent philosophy of nature. Without bothering themselves about such questions, their authors devote themselves, without manifest anxiety, to getting on with the work of science.

Theological depth has become for most scientists irrelevant. There are of course a number of scientists as pious as any in the seventeenth century; a like number are equally committed to articulate atheism. For most scientists, however, the issue has ceased to have any meaning. In the three centuries that have passed since Newton published the *Principia*, Christianity and science have exchanged roles, and natural science today occupies the position in Western civilization that Christianity once held. Theologians are now the small handful. Once theology was queen of all the sciences. We have redefined what the word *science* means, and every other intellectual discipline now measures itself against the enterprise that carries the word in its new meaning as its name.

Thus the scientific career of Isaac Newton enables us to appreciate the full extent to which natural science has been the most successful and significant endeavor of the modern world, reshaping first the intellectual structure of the West, then the economic system, and finally society itself. There is no way to avoid the conclusion: the scientists have inherited the earth. The rest of us are waiting breathlessly to see what they will do with it.

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A Horse at the Hirshhorn

ERIC WEIL

Large brown canvas, white dots and lines, a few
Darker brown areas. The title card says HORSE.

I scan shapes and colors, strike my chin-scratching
Think-pose, have I perceived some Essence of Horse

The artist smeared in with his palette knife,
The ripple of muscles along a galloping flank,

The rhythmic rise and fall of mane? At first,
Nothing occurs; I consider memory, expectation,

The ease of confusing a sequence of events:
Which did I do first, read card or view painting?

The wide spot on this line could be a knee,
this feathery tuft of white, a fetlock. Look!

This dark splotch near the bottom must be an eye.
Collecting parts into a whole, I feel satisfaction,

A kinship with the artist and his arrangement . . .
Yet "HORSE" seems arbitrary, this horse leg

could be the proboscis of an anteater, the wing
Of a dead swan in mud. Which vision to accept?

An answer comes in overhearing, "Looks like
A train wreck to me, what's it called? Horse? Okay."

ERIC WEIL has published poems in the *Greensboro Review*, *Poetry*, and *Appalachian Journal*.

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MEMOIR

George P. Elliott

ROBERT BRUSTEIN

I learned of George P. Elliott's death last May in the course of a conversation with our friend, Robert Pack, who thought I knew. Actually, I did not know that he had been dead for more than two weeks because there was no obituary in the *New York Times*. The failure of our major American newspaper to take note of the passing of one of our more significant writers has more than the obvious irony, since George had been ignoring the *Times* for years. Still, it was also a melancholy commentary on the fickle, fragmented nature of our literary culture. George lived for over a decade in Syracuse, out of the swim of New York, teaching in an academic English department where he also served for a time as chairman. He had written almost every day of his adult life—even when he visited friends for a weekend he insisted on spending the morning at a borrowed desk—but despite his reputation in certain circles, despite the large number of books he had published in his lifetime, he had been unable to find a publisher for his later works. It can be argued that he had not fulfilled his early promise as a writer of fiction, but nothing George wrote was without value, and his essays remained as percipient and brave as ever. It was simply that he had fallen, quite precipitously, out of fashion.

George resented this, with a cold, icy anger that showed itself in the corners of his warm mouth. But there is no question that he had also sought it. Midway through his life, at the height of his reputation, on the threshold of a wider recognition, George made a conscious decision to refuse celebrity. This was a moral determination, as most of George's actions were, undertaken both to chasten himself and to rebuke his colleagues. George was a proud man—he often identified pride and gluttony as his major sins—and more than anything, he wanted to pull down vanity. But there is no question that he hated the vanity of others as much as he detested his own, and the obscurity he chose for himself was partly intended as his commentary on a corruptible literary world.

I first met George P. Elliott in 1955 when we were both teaching in the English department at Cornell. It was my first teaching assignment after seven years of graduate work. Although I had written a couple of book reviews for *Commentary*, George—one of the first fiction writers I had met—had already published a number of short stories. Some years older than I, he was then an assistant professor who obviously loved literature and understood society. I immediately claimed him as an intellectual father. Although somewhat reserved by nature, George responded to me with warmth and tolerated my hero worship with amusement. We ate lunch together every day in the restaurant of the hotel school where George—a large man, much given to good food and good wine—provided a running commentary on the experimental efforts of the student cooks when he was not discoursing on literature and the times. Before long, I was invited to dinner at his house, where I met his handsome, rawboned wife, Mary Emma, a talented writer, a sensitive editor, an extremely gracious hostess. I was as struck by the ease of their domestic life as I was by George's calm and maturity and human understanding. He seemed to possess the wisdom and patience which I, in my rash early years, so sorely lacked, and his conver-

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sation was invariably a form of genuine nourishment for my hungry mind.

Before long, I found myself in a position to bring my appreciation of George's gifts to a wider public. I persuaded *Commentary* to let me review his first long work, a novella called *Parktilden Village*. The book was about an amoral sociologist who does research on comic books; as a result, he starts to produce a successful comic strip of his own, destroying a few young lives along the way. Like all of George's work, *Parktilden Village* was informed by a strong critical viewpoint, particularly his conviction that by analyzing mass culture without making judgments on it, the social sciences were helping to erode the moral and social values of contemporary America. The book also contained the seeds of a later concern of George's, his criticism of the way some artists and intellectuals were surrendering their own values for the sake of advancement—a process that has now become so widespread that we don't even notice it any more. Besides its moral passion, the book contained eloquence and simplicity; George was quickly establishing himself as one of those rare souls who knew how to dramatize a literary idea.

George's short stories had the same harmonious mix of passion and thought; one of the ways he achieved this was through the conventions of science fiction. Among the more memorable of these futuristic moral tales were "Sandra" and "The NRACP," both included later in a volume called *Among the Dangs*. "The NRACP" carried America's current racial problems to a horrifying conclusion. The benign-sounding "relocation of colored people" turned out to be the incarceration of blacks in a closely guarded prison compound, where they were first exterminated and then turned into canned dog food by their captors. In "Sandra," George imagined a future in which it would be possible to buy female slaves in department stores. By gradually granting his slave privileges, the hero eventually ends up cooking her food and making her bed—a fictional metaphor that anticipated by about ten years the current concept of the male housewife.

In addition to stories, novels, and poems, George was writing essays at this time; the earliest of these were collected in a volume called *A Piece of Lettuce*. In some ways, I found George's essays even more congenial than his fiction; they were certainly more original, because in them George was effectively developing a new prose form. George's customary procedure was to start with some biographical anecdote—usually concerning his boyhood on an Indiana farm—then to move on impressionistically to a more general discussion of literature and society. This process of alternating between reminiscence and criticism always struck me as a dazzling way of balancing the perceptions of the reflective observer with the object under scrutiny. And since George handled this balance with tact and discretion, the biographical element was never an intrusion, always a revelation.

In "A Brown Fountain Pen," for example, George described how his father, a fastidious man, retrieved his son's first pen from a privy, thus determining not only George's decision to become a writer but his future attitudes toward reason, determinism, and mysticism. In "Getting Away From the Chickens," he told how the experience of having a hen lay an egg in his mouth influenced his later approach to poetic symbolism. And in the title essay, he linked his memory of a time when a piece of lettuce lodged in his baby brother's eye with his own impressions of Tolstoy and the "law-obeying, mediocre world."

The first lines of these essays display their unusual nature: "When I was eight or nine determinism came to me in the form of a flight of arrows." "The day I turned three I learned how important it was that I had been born on my mother's birthday." "The famous inalienable error about happiness is proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence." "The first time I tried to come to age, my sinews turned to butter and my father threw me." The quotidian topic sentence leads gracefully into the supple anecdote, then into a sagacious generalization on literature or society—a method that has yet to be honored through imitation or celebration.

Included in the same volume is an essay called "Who Is We," George's first direct blast at the bastions of the New York intelligentsia. Hitherto reflective in his prose and Horatian in his satire, George turned Juvenalian in this piece—a change which suggests how deeply the subject affected him. What was eating George is immediately obvious in the tone of his opening paragraphs, where

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he satirized what he called the "tend- and trendency-spotters" of the day.

> Present-day Americans are engaged in a regular tidal wave of a movement to keep on doing what they're doing and not be *we*—that is, not to contribute intellectual articles to *Partisan Review*, etc., not to be connected with Columbia (or with NYU, CCNY, New School, Hunter, Fordham, Brooklyn, Queens, Union Theological, Jewish Theological, or the Julliard School of Music).

Following this, George got more personal, attacking Diana Trilling, Eric Bentley, Mary McCarthy, Allen Ginsberg, and Leslie Fiedler (particularly)—the most celebrated of the 107 *we*'s (by George's estimate) who were currently announcing what everyone else in America was supposed to think. "By a strange cooptation," he added testily, "they form a club from which provincials east, west, north, and south feel excluded. . . . New York is the chief source of power—i.e., reputation, publishing, money—and *we* are in on the ground floor. Advice to up-and-coming young intellectuals: Get yourself born in New York City and if you're a woman be chic; in any case, wherever you're from, even if you're dowdy and Michigan, attend Columbia and get yourself invited to certain parties."

A writer newly based in New York and teaching at Barnard, George was attempting to act as spokesman for another group of "we," the disenfranchised, intelligent people in other parts of the country whose ideas and tastes were being dictated to by a small clique of intellectuals in a single cosmopolitan center. On the face of it, George's purpose was sensible—to urge everyone, including the "we" intellectuals, to think for themselves—that is, to trade the "we" for "I." Still, there was something in the tone of the piece—a note of resentment and irritation, perhaps—that was in excess of its purpose. Worse, the essay seemed to suggest that New York publishing and New York intellectual life were dominated mostly by Jews from New York universities; and whatever the truth of this charge, it was bound to trigger a strong reaction, if not a suspicion (unfounded) that George was secretly anti-Semitic. At best, the essay was dismissed as the sour grapes of an outsider—which proved George's point. But it resulted in a new hostility toward this *Hudson Review*-oriented, Barnard-centered Hoosier which caused some unpleasantness on social occasions.

Like most of us (we), George was ambivalent about his standing in the pantheon of New York literary life. The resentment he was arousing first saddened him, then angered him, then helped to determine his future. In a way, the publication of "Who Is We" was as fateful for George as the publication of *Making It* was for Norman Podhoretz. It certainly had a similar influence—perhaps part of an unconscious plan—on the decisions of his life. These inevitably found a geographical expression, which was already implicit in the essay. For George had now resolved to leave his comfortable post at Barnard—to abandon the literary parties, the publishing contacts, and the weekly volleyball game we played together—and return to Berkeley, where he had spent his earliest years as a writer. When he later moved East again, settling down in the English department of Syracuse, he was a changed man.

One change I noted was a new defensiveness in regard to his work. As a teacher of writing, George always knew how to give criticism; as a writer himself, he also knew how to take it. In the past, George usually welcomed comments from his friends; now he seemed to avoid them. When I went to Yale and started a theater there, George sent me a play, a long epic work about the Byzantine Empire. It reminded me of Hardy's *The Dynasts* in its lack of dramatic economy, and the dialogue was not really speakable. I don't know why, but George had not been able to transmit his enthusiasm for the period to the reader. I tried to tell him this as gently as I could, suggesting that he publish the work in book form. I tried to be tactful; I was already sensing how sensitive he was to rejection. I offered to discuss the work with him at greater length during a visit I was planning to Syracuse. George replied with a gruffness that was not characteristic: "I am of course sorry that you reject my play. I have no use for a play which is only to be read—such a closet drama is nothing. . . . Since I find the whole matter very painful, I would prefer not to talk about it while you are here in March."

My failure to respond properly to his Byzantium drama created some tensions that affected our future relations. Another source of tension was what George considered my dan-

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gerous sympathy for certain movements in culture, particularly the influence of Antonin Artaud. George had emerged from the sixties with a new combativeness, his native middle-American conservatism expressing itself in a scorn both for political and cultural radicalism. He didn't share the sympathy of the liberal middle class for the women's movement, and he had even less patience for the revolutionary talk then popular in the university. But George's opinions were still modified by a warm humanity. In a brilliant essay, "Revolution Instead," he balanced his support for those who opposed the Vietnam War with fury at those who proposed to oppose it violently, thus charting for many of us the difficult course we were trying to steer between resistance and revolution.

But when he collected some of these essays in a book called *Conversions,* it was barely noticed as a publishing event, except as a symbol of a reactionary temperament. George sent me the volume with a most curious letter in which he said that while he knew I was indifferent to his ideas, he hoped they were eloquently enough expressed to affect my own. I read the book immediately with a great deal of pleasure and agreement, and wrote to him of my admiration. But his letter again suggested how sensitive he had grown toward the opinions of others. He seemed eager for combat, ready for rejection. I learned that he was quarreling with some of his closest friends. Our own quarrel was settled, but our relationship remained uneasy. Although I visited him and Mary Emma a few times in ensuing years, and our correspondence continued unabated, I always sensed something guarded in our communications.

The last time I saw George was when he accepted my invitation to come to Yale in 1976 and lecture our students on Chekhov—a writer for whom we shared a mutual and deep admiration. I had met him again the previous summer, after a long period of separation, when Bob Pack asked me to come to Breadloaf with my wife to talk about American playwriting. Breadloaf was important to me that summer, and not just because of the opportunity it offered to renew my friendship with George. Coming from the hothouse atmosphere of theater, with its competitive rivalries and omnipresent schadenfreude, I was surprised and delighted at the generosity that the Breadloaf poets and novelists typically displayed toward one another's work.

George was at the center of this authorial generosity. By this time, he had grown a beard, speckled with gray, which gave him a grandfatherly mien, and the young writers treated him like a patriarch. As a matter of fact, George was now a grandfather, his daughter, Nora, having given birth to a boy in Berkeley. George usually referred to the child as "Jacob Cohen," no doubt amused at finding himself with a half-Jewish grandson. At Breadloaf, he was tanned, relaxed, and healthy, and our friendship was renewed amidst the cordial working conditions of that lovely, bucolic writer's retreat.

George came up to Yale the following autumn. His talk to our students was beautifully formulated, passionate, profound. I was reminded again how much this gentle, moral man had in common with Chekhov, the subject of his lecture. After my wife had served him a good dinner, complete with a French wine which he savored for hours, George packed up and returned to Syracuse to continue work on the Byzantium novel that nobody wanted to publish—the fictionalization of a play that nobody wanted to produce.

George P. Elliott left behind him four novels, two collections of short stories, two books of essays, and a fine narrative poem called *Fever and Chills.* In time, these works will be properly assessed and George's contribution to our literature celebrated. What will possibly not be fully appreciated immediately is the extent of the sacrifice he made to be an American writer. George loved the things of the world and, like the failed monk he was, flagellated himself for it. He wanted fame, and arranged his life for obscurity. He wanted recognition and banished himself from the seat of the awards. He wanted to influence his time and ended up isolated in an academic English department. George continually struggled with the appetites of his soul as he struggled with the appetites of his body. The struggle exacted its toll on him, and it certainly affected his good nature, but although such a struggle is never exactly won, there is a kind of victory in the fact that it continues. George continued it until the day he died, and that may be his greatest legacy. For is not a moral creative life—in our celebrity-smitten age—the equivalent of a work of art?

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V. S. Naipaul

ROBERT BOYERS

Twenty years ago, in 1961, V. S. Naipaul published a six-hundred-page novel called *A House for Mr. Biswas.* A number of readers thought it a masterpiece, and each of his five subsequent novels has been accorded comparable praise by critics and reviewers. This has been the case with his several books of nonfiction as well, including most especially *The Loss of El Dorado* (a strange "meditation" on the history of Naipaul's Trinidad) and the polemical travel memoir *India: A Wounded Civilization.* All but the last of his fifteen books are available in a Penguin paperback edition, and he is frequently mentioned as a leading candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Yet it is a fact that, in the United States more than in England, Naipaul has relatively few readers. Novelists far more difficult and more technically demanding sell many more books, attract more sustained critical attention, and are taught more regularly in the college classroom. A cynical explanation would have it that Naipaul is too serious, too austere to appeal to most readers, that Americans especially read to be either edified or tickled, and that academics have no use for anything they cannot work at as if it were a code to be broken. Naipaul may be witty and morally bracing; he may even create memorable characters. But his novels are not likely to console anyone, and have too much to do with the real world—with politics and race and personality—to appeal to readers with an appetite for exclusively "literary" fictions. They are difficult in the wrong way, and for the wrong reasons. Were Naipaul a more generous man, a man more sensible of our common need for positive recommendations and moderately consoling resolutions, his books would be easier to take. Were he more hopeful about the advantages available to some of the people in the world his characters inhabit, he would seem less single-minded, less bitter and alienating.

The cynical explanation has a good deal to recommend it. In part it is accurate. It is interesting, too, and brings to our attention a number of extraliterary considerations we would do well to pursue. But it is also, perhaps, a little unreasonable. For Naipaul has his fair share of readers, and more and more his work is known to represent a real alternative to the fiction that passes for "advanced" writing in this country. His books *are* demanding and, in the main, unpleasant, and there is no reason to feel that they should appeal to everyone. More important, they bear witness to an experience that is entirely unfamiliar to Anglo-American readers, and invoke a version of political reality that is inimical to the humane aspirations of liberal intellectuals. For it is the constant burden of Naipaul's fiction to suggest that human beings are fundamentally unequal, and that right thinking cannot alter the facts of life. "The sad fact about prejudices," he has written, ". . . is that they are an accretion of observations and cannot be destroyed by simple contradiction." This attitude, more than anything else, has made him a suspicious character at a time when most serious readers like to pretend there is nothing they cannot handle.

Naipaul is our primary novelist of disorder and breakdown. Like Stendhal, he is interested in the phenomenon of revolution,

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though he feels that the revolutions of our time have come to nothing and have justly brought to despair both adherents and opponents. In the wake of extinguished revolutionary prospects, he can propose, at best, lucidity and remembrance. With no Stendhalian cult of energy to encourage him, he finds nothing to support, no party to stand by, no social class or character type to esteem. He detests privilege *and* equality, oppressors *and* oppressed. His typical protagonist figures are negative characters, inadequate in all but their capacity to register shame or to reflect upon their failures. Affection is reserved for those who struggle against things as they are without imagining that they will effect a general or enduring improvement; compassion is reserved for those who can find no suitable way to express love or allegiance and see themselves driven to loathing or betrayal. For every decent impulse recorded in a Naipaul novel there are three or four that express a general revulsion from life with others and from the hope of a redemptive principle on which people may depend. The most telling detail in the novels of Naipaul's maturity is the acute sensitivity to smell exhibited by the superior protagonist. "In this smell of heated sweat," Ralph Singh recalls in *The Mimic Men*, " . . . I tried to find virtue, the virtue of the poor, the laboring, the oppressed. Such is the vulgarity that mobs generate, in themselves and in their manipulators." The note of disgust, of an offended superiority, resounds through much of Naipaul's fiction, and his attempt to master that revulsion has been the most satisfying aspect of his development as a novelist.

It is tempting to think of Naipaul as a man with a plan or a blueprint for development. He did outgrow the local-color, satirical novels of his youth, and he has sometimes seemed to be moving deliberately toward a kind of political fiction that would set him more squarely in the tradition of Conrad and Stendhal than in the line of Caribbean and Third World writers with whom he is often compared. At the same time, no writer of equivalent stature has so fiercely resisted the temptation to open up his narratives, to invite the participation of a wider range of characters, or to work with a wider range of emotions. There has been development, but it has taken the form of refinement, not enlargement, of scope or feeling. The prose, from the first a sharp instrument wielded with scrupulous restraint, has nicely accommodated itself to more brutal uses, but is still the rather spare and self-limiting tool it always was. The writer who could do the portrait of Mr. Biswas in 1961—a portrait alternately satirical and forgiving—has never done a richer portrait, though he has found ways of placing his characters in more complex circumstances and, therefore, of motivating them more variously. It may be—as it seems to me—that Naipaul's most recent novel, *A Bend in the River*, is his best, but to speak of his development is to describe a progress both fitful and, in some fundamental way, compromised.

The early novels were promising. They seemed so when they appeared, and they seem so now. Even the straggly, episodic *Miguel Street* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* are readable and, in their way, delightful. They rely more than they should on eccentric character profiles and on quaint native dialects, but from the perspective of the present moment one sees that Naipaul was already working with his proper materials. His characteristic mode is not comedy of manners, as it was then, but the young novelist could not be expected to bring to bear upon his materials the brutal clarities and discriminations he has exercised more recently. The small dramas of West Indian island life permitted Naipaul to think about the prospects of democracy and the inducements to change required in a society typically resistant to "progress." He cared enough about the issues to plot his dramas carefully, and showed at the same time that he had no way really to judge what he saw, to establish a reliable angle of vision. Anecdotes were included for no better reason than that they seemed amusing, and dialogue "exposed" characters on the simple principle that exposure is preferable to concealment. The obvious truth worked at so assiduously is that people make deals and are susceptible to the small corruptions that are so much a part of political life in advanced as in backward societies.

The first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, published in 1957, focuses attention on the kind of bogus social climber and briefly successful politician who in subsequent works is granted only marginal novelistic status. Why the fig-

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ure should once have seemed central to Naipaul is not hard to figure out. Ganesh Ransumair seemed to him the type of the people's representative in a Third World society. An opportunist, lacking in formal education but ever ready to make use of advanced ideas he can but barely comprehend, he is at once a simpleton and a charlatan, something more than a perfect fool and less than a demagogue. Naipaul's narrator stresses Ganesh's typicality throughout, and goes so far as to contend that "the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times." One doesn't know quite what to make of this, but it is clear that Naipaul thought to provide an analysis of Third World social institutions by studying the career of Ganesh. Were Naipaul's relation to his narrator more carefully defined, we should know better what to make of the claims advanced for Ganesh's typicality. As it is, we can say only that the narrator is himself an object of mild ridicule as well as a deftly ironical observer with a nice comic touch. Naipaul decided to place Ganesh at the center of his novel because he felt that the rise and fall of such a man would tell us what we need to know about his society without requiring a definitive or summary analysis such as a fully reliable narrator might provide. More, it is possible to laugh at the character without overlooking the fact that he is capable of great mischief. Naipaul was not yet ready to direct at his representative types the withering contempt and unforgiving severities he has since adopted. The novel succeeds as a portrait of a man who learns that it is better to make things happen than to suffer them as they occur. It fails as an attempt to show that such a person is the typical representative of his society and that the society, in effect, has in him what it deserves.

The most surprising feature of Naipaul's book, as we look ahead to its successor volumes, is the degree to which it forecasts certain problems he has had to negotiate all along. Primary among these are two: the relation between author and narrator, and the detail required to bring to life a social or political setting. These we shall examine one at a time. First, the narrator. In *The Mystic Masseur* he has a rather narrow terrain to cover. He is and is not a part of what he sees. In place of anger he inclines to acceptance, so that the satirical thrustings are felt, not as actively corrective insights, but as colorings of a surface that might otherwise seem too uniform in its almost predictable simplicities. The author cares less about the narrator than about Ganesh and believes that the reader will work out for himself an appropriate relation to the ironies at issue. There is no illogic in the depictions, and the narrative voice is never asked to perform at a pitch that would seem to the reader unlikely or unseemly. Where the author's relation to the narrator is at all problematic, the reader necessarily hesitates to complain, since Naipaul himself seems not to care about the issues in a way that would invite, or satisfy, passionate inquiry.

In the mature fiction this is never the case. Naipaul's involvement in the issues and in the judgments that are ever-present in the arrangement of his materials makes it necessary that we inquire scrupulously. Even where—as in *The Mimic Men*—he is not careful enough to differentiate his own views from the views expressed by his narrator, the matter of discrimination bears heavily upon our responses to events. What do we think of the so-called colonial mentality? What can socialism amount to in a newly independent state? These are questions we can address only when we have considered what Naipaul wants us to think of them. We are, after all, looking at them as readers of particular novels, and we cannot know what to accept or resist unless we understand how things stand in those novels. It is one thing to believe, with Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, that to assume political power in a Caribbean country is to enter into a tragic relationship with one's constituents. It is something else to conclude that, though the view is persuasive, it is hardly what Naipaul believes, and hardly what events in the novel are organized to show. It matters that in *The Mimic Men* Ralph Singh is in flight from active life as he narrates the events of his political career. It matters that at forty he seems to care about the past largely as a way to establish in the present materials adequate to sustain a contemplative life. Would Naipaul have brought Singh to his present condition if he wanted us to think him a reliable witness? Would he have made him so impressively intelligent if he wanted us to stand apart from him and to weigh his observations with the skep-

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tical detachment we reserve for the pronouncements of others?

We want answers to these questions as we read *The Mimic Men*, and find that there is no way to come up with them. No one demands that Naipaul speak in his own voice, that he commit himself absolutely on every issue. We ask only that he furnish a point of view to which we can respond more or less consistently. If Singh were the only narrative presence in the novel, we should know how to establish a consistent relation to him. If there were an alternative presence, or several narrative sources, we should similarly decide—by playing off one stress against another—what Naipaul intended. Readers might differ with one another, but each would feel that he had been given a chance to reach a decision for himself. In effect, what Naipaul does in *The Mimic Men* is to pretend that it does not matter what the author thinks. Ralph Singh is entirely capable of speaking for himself, and we are free to accept or reject only what *he* says. Naipaul does not consider that the issues involved may seem to us too signally important to be left entirely in his narrator's capable hands. Especially will this be true when we feel, as we do from time to time, that there is an authorial presence at work in the narrative voice, and that it wishes to withhold itself from some of the judgments spoken, though it is ever determined to stay out of sight. At such times we have to feel that Naipaul wants to have it both ways: he wants to be able to say, with Singh, that chaos is the natural and terrible order of things, and that he never meant to say such an awful thing, that it could come only from a fellow like Singh who had fallen so far. He wants to take credit for the hard truths and to say that he knows better than to fall for them.

The problem is most apparent in books with a first-person narrator who is an intelligent and articulate witness. By contrast, we have no problem at all with the two brilliant stories included in Naipaul's *In a Free State*. There the speakers are so obviously pathetic victims of the conditions they describe that we cannot for a moment identify them with an authorial presence. Not only their dilemmas but their speech patterns give them away—place them, as it were. We do not need to be told that the fellow who lives in the streets of Bombay in "One Out of Many" cannot possibly speak for Naipaul, or that the driven creature in "Tell Me Who to Kill" harbors a kind of anger that can belong only to a man with a very low estimation of his endowments. More elusive by far is the narrator-protagonist of *A Bend in the River*. For Salim is at once shrewd and innocent, capable and adrift. From time to time he says things that make us wince, so readily can he be influenced to shift his ground. What had seemed at one moment a settled conviction is displaced rapidly by another, and for the smallest of reasons. Determined to look at a friend or antagonist in one way, he suddenly sees something that changes his mind altogether. Though he has the words to describe what he sees, and reads human motive with the skill of a practiced novelist, he allows himself to drift into precincts of human relation he knows to be forbidding and ruinous, and is inclined to thematize experience in a way that underlines his distance from Naipaul.

At the same time—and here is the nub of the problem—even when he most resembles the student of life, the young man from the Third World "provinces" entering the real world for the first time, he draws conclusions that seem to us terribly impressive. They have the ring of formulations we encounter in Naipaul's nonfiction. Even the opening lines of the novel are impressive in this way: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." Or consider the narrator's response to a rather high-toned party he attends, at which he hears for the first time the sonorous protest songs of Joan Baez played on a phonograph: "It was make-believe—I never doubted that. You couldn't listen to sweet songs about injustice unless you expected justice and received it most of the time. You couldn't sing songs about the end of the world unless . . . you felt that the world was going on and you were safe in it. How easy it was, in that room, to make those assumptions." Are these the plausible reflections of a man who has had neither formal education nor a range of experience in which the habit of thought would have been strenuously encouraged? It is clear that, for the purposes of his story, Naipaul had to make Salim what he is. A more experienced man, with greater "advantages," would not have had access to the

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events and various human types he meets in the course of the novel. He'd have been too intelligent to take certain risks, too secure to traffic with certain kinds of people. But how does he come by his powers of analysis? To what extent are his judgments a reflection merely of a peculiar mind-set that has had only the experience of loss and retreat to furnish models of possibility? If we were more certain that Naipaul wished to establish Salim as a thoroughly adequate and reliable witness, we should have fewer incentives to close reading than the novel actually provides. But we should also feel more compelled to address the political issues themselves in place of the literary questions the novel sets in our way.

With *Biswas* and the other third-person omniscient narratives—including *In a Free State, Guerrillas*, and *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*—we are on firmer, if not more fruitful, terrain. We do not know, always, what Naipaul would like us to feel about an issue, but we do know what are the options and can declare precisely how much Naipaul has invested in each of them. In *Biswas* it is hard to say what Naipaul takes to be the future of the eccentric resistance and protest represented by his central character; but we do know that Biswas himself took the protest as far as he could, and that Naipaul thought it extraordinary even as he thought it hopeless and pathetic. In *Guerrillas* we are given no definitive alternative to political turmoil and personal malaise, but it is clear that to Naipaul some forms of human perversity are preferable to others. We know that he can sympathize with those who struggle with their own futility, provided only that they place themselves aggressively in the eye of the disorder they oppose and covet. And we know that those—like the protagonist's mistress Jane—who play at revolution, who move easily in the knowledge of their own security are treated with contempt and made to suffer at last what they deserve. *Guerrillas* is an ugly book. Within this kind of knowledge there is room for considerable complexity and ambivalence, and no one should suppose that Naipaul had to sacrifice doubt to achieve clarity.

Problems of point of view, of authorial presence and intention assume significance only when they are seen to serve or to stand in the way of the novelist's emerging vision. Just so, when we have doubts about the sheer physical detail brought to bear upon that vision, we assume that the vision cannot stand on the rhetorical basis provided by the author's assertions. In one novel after another, Naipaul or his protagonist-narrator will announce that in the Third World the best intentions amount at last to nothing; that what has seemed "whole" or intact has seemed so only because of the power of illusion; that nothing useful can ever really be done for "the people," who betray whatever favors they receive. These and other views abound in the light comedies and in the darker works. Even in Naipaul's only "English" novel, *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, one finds attenuated versions of the familiar insights presented from the perspective of the hardly passionate Mr. Stone. Consider: "And the further the brilliance receded the more clearly he recognized its unusual quality. It was a brilliance which was incapable of being sustained, yet a brilliance of which every diminution was a loss to be mourned, a reminder of darkness that had been lived through and a threat of the darkness that was to come." For "brilliance" here we read in the other novels "the mobilization of power," for "darkness" "business as usual or—no business at all." Either way, Naipaul's represented view is that, whatever the ephemeral accession to power or influence of this force or that, the briefly activated energies and enthusiasms are bound to run down. In the end the beasts will bloody themselves and all around them. Even the pacific Mr. Stone concludes on the last page of Naipaul's novel that "it was not by creation that man demonstrated his power and defied this hostile order, but by destruction." And as he feels himself grow taller, he is said to walk "as the destroyer, as the man who carried the possibility of the earth's destruction within him." This is rather a silly fantasy to be entertained by so settled a bourgeois as Mr. Stone, but it is fitting that even he should have had ascribed to him a view that seems so menacing when it is associated with Naipaul's other characters.

The views of men like Stone, Singh, Salim, or Peter Roche of *Guerrillas* may be said to underlie, though not to constitute, the vision each work seeks to embody. For example, the fact that Roche is eager to generalize his own

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shame and moral doubt, and therefore to call into question the motives of others who exhibit political courage, is not enough to indicate the vision of *Guerrillas*. For that we need the kind of detail which can make us feel that Roche does truly represent the most typical kind of white liberal involvement in contemporary Third World politics. We must feel that Roche has been made to test the limits of the universe he moves in, that his failures are not determined by Naipaul's fixed view of him but by a genuine interaction with the circumstances that are said to defeat him. If we feel that Naipaul has simply insisted upon a particular view of things, we can do nothing but accept or reject the view. To engage it, as we engage a vision that asks to be taken up and looked at from several angles, we must feel that the novel has created its own hard facts to negotiate. It must have pitted its own predispositions, the novelist's own yearnings and ideas, against what can only be called necessity. No doubt one man's necessity may be another man's whim, but it is reasonable to suppose that most readers will agree on what the novel requires. Naipaul succeeds as a writer when he sets up a universe, usually political, that can significantly check his own too ready impulse to dismiss everything before it has really been given a chance.

In *Biswas* the vision, such as it is, requires not the detail we associate with political conflict but a matrix of social relations so dense that it will be thought to restrain the protagonist's quirky individualism. So leisurely a novel is *Biswas*, so carefully does Naipaul spread before us the practices and emblems by which a traditional society is known to its constituents that we never doubt the authority of the emergent vision. It is a vision of an orthodox communal life corrupted by its own rigidities and unable to respond—except with resentment and calumny—to the forces that would refresh it. What makes the novel so fine, so unusual, is not Naipaul's organizing of evidence to show that the modern world erodes and corrupts traditional institutions. His ambivalent support of rebellion and individualism does not entitle him to special praise or attention. Who isn't, in our time, an opponent of the blind traditionalism that stunts lives in places like India and Trinidad? *Biswas* claims our attention because it demonstrates what it is like to be provoked to rebellion and to lack the means to do it properly. Naipaul's goal is to sink Biswas so deep in the traditional life represented by Hanuman House and the Tulsi family that he has no alternative, as a man of spirit, but to scream and fight. And having put his man there, where others more or less like him spend their narrow lives, Naipaul finds also that he must allow the man one or two of the fragile victories a man of spirit would require to carry on. Biswas knows, as he struggles, that he is a defeated man, that he will sink further and further into the void occupied for so long by others in such families. But he holds before him the possibility of small pleasures, a house of his own he can retreat to in place of the communal structures that would chasten his options past the point of tolerance. What makes it all so compelling is the apparently easy accumulation of detail to make the life at issue seem inevitable, encompassing, at once human in its scale and terrible in its fixities. We are speaking here of the way food is prepared and served, the way children are praised and punished, the relative obligations of wives and husbands, the degree of self-expression prescribed for these occasions and for those, and so on, right down to the toilet arrangements that obtain in large families. Had Naipaul elevated any of these to the status of subjects in their own right, his novel would read more like a documentary history than like the story of a man. It is his great achievement to have avoided a mechanical piling on of details and yet to have planted his character amidst the objects and customs of his world in such a way that, try as he will, they remain a part of him and of all he can be.

There is no politics in *Biswas* because neither the protagonist nor anyone else in the novel has been stimulated to conceive of the future as something that can be affected by collective effort. A novel in which collective action is to be made a primary issue requires another kind of detail, and another kind of consciousness at or near the center. That consciousness will be susceptible to the fascination of ideas and to identification with an ideological cause. Biswas has no interest in ideas or in any general view of the future they may propose. He opposes the social order out of personal necessity, not out of a

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conviction that grows with the growth of his thought. He learns certain things, but his capacity for abstract thought remains primitive, and he conceives the future more as a dream than as an altered order of relations. Collective action would suggest to him a routine commerce with just those persons he would be least likely to trust. He is remote from any conception of political detail because his plots are in the main expressions of blind rage or immediate inspiration. What makes him so attractive as a person makes him politically hopeless.

Naipaul is often considered a political novelist, but not until *A Bend in the River* did he write a novel in the great tradition of Western political fiction. Earlier, in a work like *In a Free State,* he exhibited merely a will to political fiction and a gift for drawing people in crisis. There are ideas in the novel. People know how to think. There is even a conception of the future. But it is all atmospheric, sketched in at the level of background. The sketches are vivid, intense, frightening. One has a sense of dangerous ideas "in the air," of a politics taking shape somewhere but out of sight, of persons touched by strong ideological currents they have not the ability to grasp or discriminate among. Political reality is given in the form of starkly isolated tableaux: a sudden glimpse of tribal prisoners in a civil war, men stripped of their newly won freedom and reduced again to their immemorial status: "Some were roped up in the traditional forest way, neck to neck, . . . as though for delivery to the slave-merchant." The image is regarded as sufficient, a sign of something ended, an emblem. Ignored are the actual programs or strategies of the captured men, the organizational difficulties of the conquering armies and their president, the relation between the frail structure of capital and the struggle for unification and independence. *In a Free State* is a moving and powerful work, but to think of it as a political novel is to suppose that such a novel can work largely at the level of symbolic gesture. What separates *In a Free State* from the political novel some readers would like it to be is the absence of appropriate detail and the related absorption in a consciousness whose counters are mostly personal and, in an unduly limiting sense, subjective.

Let us be clear about this. The central figure in the work, an Englishman named Bobby, thinks of his life as deeply implicated in the future of the African state to which he is attached as a civil servant. But his relation to the state is given at the level of personal investment alone. Here and there a particular attitude to an issue is vaguely hinted, but the stress is on the fact that his position makes Bobby feel he belongs to something. He wants to do some good and incidentally to continue to have the homosexual adventures he craves. Ultimately, before he finally gets back to the safety of the western compound, he is detained on the road and beaten. The brief encounter with political reality teaches Bobby that his hopes for a political solution to African problems and for his own useful role in effecting that solution are misguided. But the insight may be said to have only marginal political status. How representative are the isolated events of the novel? What have men like Bobby actually done in the countries in which they serve? How is power in an African state shifted from one party to another? From what sources do Bobby and his traveling companion, Linda, learn to feel as they do about those they administer? To be fair, we think of such things only when we try to think of *In a Free State* as a political novel. As readers of the novel we are never tempted to think in such terms because we are content to read it as a novel of sensibility. We are interested in Bobby as we are interested in, say, a James character who thinks he knows what life is all about better than he actually does. It makes no sense to say of such characters that they have no relation to politics or that they are not social beings. They are what they are in part because of conditions obtaining in their society; but only if the social constraints are stressed *as determinants* do we agree to call the books in question social novels. Just so can we consider *In a Free State* a political novel only if specifically political conflicts and loyalties are brought into play; so too must characters be shown to think of themselves as political actors in a struggle for which there are definable goals and more or less suitable strategies. The fact that we cannot say what are the political objectives of the parties to the vague conflict that conditions everything in *In a Free State* determines our judgment of it as a novel of sensibility. There is nothing wrong or inferior in such a

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work, though it is apt to be misleading when it makes political noises that may be taken for the real thing.

One feels, in reading Naipaul's novel, that he understands Africa, and that this particular understanding conditions his sense of human possibility in general. But the understanding is never made concrete in a way we can identify with Conrad's *Nostromo* or with Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma.* In those works, political intrigue is more than a backdrop for the dramas of sensibility their authors wish to unfold. Characters regard their personal fates as intimately bound up with social and political arrangements that can be controlled only by those who are capable of intrigue and calculation. Naipaul seems more interested in a spiritual or psychological state than in the machinery of action, and so gives us a study of human nature in place of the study he was tempted to do.

Does it matter that we call one book a novel of sensibility, another a political fiction? Such designations do help us to focus our questions and to demand of a work only what it is designed to give. They are also useful when, as with Naipaul, the author involved may be said to have moved from one kind of work to another. In sheer economy and efficiency of suggestion Naipaul is not likely to surpass *In a Free State. Guerrillas,* by contrast, goes too far in fleshing out the menace without significantly extending our understanding of political circumstance or personal motive. We are treated to a hideous cruelty and perversion that we were perfectly capable of imagining for ourselves in the earlier work. *A Bend in the River,* though, does enlarge our understanding without sacrificing either implication or shapeliness. It does mark Naipaul's movement to a more difficult and demanding fiction. It is a narrative rich in complication and incident, though it withholds as much as it delivers. It gets at the mechanics of power while suggesting that there is much it cannot explain or show. To speak of it as a political novel is to consider that it can handle ideas and the consciousness of ideas as well as it can handle personal motive. We conclude that it is adequate to its own purposes and to our designation of it.

I said earlier that the most satisfying aspect of Naipaul's development was his attempt to master his inveterate revulsions: from persons, from groups, from political action itself. That self-mastery is a function, we may say, of vision and of art. The sentiments exhibited in the recent novel are no nicer than those found in earlier books. There is no greater optimism about revolution. The African setting is as torn by senseless violence as it ever was. Yet we feel, throughout, that Naipaul is examining things as they are. We do not entertain the suspicion that he simply contrived to make things as bad as he could to justify his own revulsion. It may be that conditions in Africa are better, or worse, than they appear in the book, but we have reason to believe they might be this way, and we understand why an intelligent person would despair of them as he does.

How does Naipaul convince us? He locates the action of the novel precisely. He creates a world that imposes itself upon people in particular ways. He shows how an economy is structured, how goods are moved from one place to another, how a market is developed and abandoned. He indicates the palpable differences between one political faction and another, and the means by which people without political traditions gain and manifest real power. He shows how no economic or social relationship in an emerging society can ever be free from politics and from the corruptions wrought by imminent disorder. And he shows, finally, how ideas are necessarily twisted and betrayed by persons who have no respect for thought itself, who have too many pressing needs to look beyond immediate utility. No one of these elements is strictly necessary to a successful political fiction, but equivalent features at least are required in any work that wishes to chart the intersection of personal and cultural necessity. In a more stable society the novelist can usually manage with fewer details, relying upon his reader to know as well as he how political and economic life are structured, how threats to the polity are handled. But Naipaul is writing about societies in transition. And in the main he is not writing about them for Third World readers. He is a Western novelist, as concerned as Thomas Mann or Conrad with broad moral issues, with man. His focus on Africa or on Trinidad or India has to do with the accident of his ancestry, an accident that determined his choice of subject more than

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his literary demeanor. He has made himself a convincing and important novelist by reconciling his vocation as student of the Third World with his other ambition: to be a writer of world stature. His ability to convince us that he knows what he evokes, that he is in control of his own feelings—not that he has suppressed them—is a consequence of his willingness to confront the mechanics of the real world.

Vision and compassion grow out of that encounter. Is this too obvious to say? Naipaul's vision—of men frightened and grasping and broken—is bracing and elusive because it reflects his sense that everything matters, that the past is implicated in every projection of the future, that the will is never entirely free unless it be to engineer its own destruction. In this, Naipaul's vision goes against the grain of the characteristic modern conviction that the "liberated" will can accomplish anything, that we can make reality in the image of our desire. Naipaul's is finally the more sociable perspective, though he would decline to put it that way himself. For, as we see in *A Bend in the River*, human beings may truly meet only where there exists a common world. There may not be enough good things to go around in that world, but at least each will have some possibility of assigning values to things and of negotiating with others about plausible objectives and liabilities. A novel in which the will is at liberty to leave or to take reality may generate thrilling special effects, but it will not generate a full respect for persons as impediments to all ideologies and abstractions. It is no coincidence that, of all Naipaul's books, *A Bend in the River* is the least colored by revulsion. It is also his least hopeful book.

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The Houseparty

CAROLINE KNOX

We were invited to a houseparty last weekend in Lake Forest,
Illinois, which I shall not soon
forget, and this is not only because I brought what turned out to
not be the right clothes for it,
but, more objectively, the people were alarming at best.
When I got up in the middle of Friday night, there were lots of
the guests
running through the upstairs hall and leaping in and out of each
other's rooms together,
who mercifully didn't see me. I had to call them all
by their first names except Mrs. Farley, even though I shall never
meet any of them again,
such as Ritzinda and Manfred, Davenport, Davis, Conall and
Yvette.
I made the mistake of telling Davenport when we were playing
croquet
that my second child at the age of three had cleverly been wont
to refer to croquet mallets as golf hammers, at which Davenport
laughed not at all;
yet, to be fair, realizing he had been less than understanding, he
very kindly told me
the plot of the Thorne Smith he had been reading the previous
night, although I bet that's not all he was doing.
Davenport confided to me over several *pousse-cafés* that he is a
grain arbitrator
and then Manfred (one of the world's worst names) came along
and they talked about grain.
Ritzinda, true to her name, wore a dress that had only one
shoulder
and not much of that on Saturday for dinner. Usually
I like to talk to men but it was difficult to talk to those,

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or difficult for them to talk to me at any rate, but that was OK,
because it transpired that the women talked together a great deal
in little pockets.
Ritzinda of the single shoulder asked me who I'd gotten to get me
invited,
and looked somewhat addled when I said that Yvette's mother had
been a cousin
of a college roommate of a classmate of Davenport's sister's piano
teacher,
and that some of these shared the same cleaning woman in
Georgetown,
which is all perfectly true, if boring. Mrs. Farley
in one of these female conversations told me about apricot oil,
much the way Davenport had told me about grain arbitration,
although I certainly don't think Mrs. Farley is in the apricot
oil business,
which she advised me to put on my skin a little at a time and it
would be absolutely wonderful.
Mrs. Farley may possibly be a hundred and goes around
completely covered with Liberty scarves
and as one might expect there was dancing Saturday night, well
into Sunday,
at which she excelled, scarves and all, and it turned out that she
had known the violinist as a young man.
Some of the other things we talked about were Carl Rogers,
shallots, bargello,
the letters of Elizabeth Trollope, tobacco barns, curare,
encaustics of the tobacco barns which are Yvette's idea of *lares et
penates*,
giving people *le question* during the French Revolution and after,
David Riesman, James Agee, and exchange students in the
Philippines.
Mason, whose job is teaching church law to seminarians for a
living and to whom I am married and with whom I went to
this houseparty,

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and who incidentally got the better of the deal, can't figure out
why I'm being disagreeable,
inasmuch as *he* spent the whole weekend in the study with a
marvelous and very complete
collection of church law books that he found there dating back
incredibly far
in their original bindings, and reading probably all of them,
and showing up for meals and cocktails during which he explained
to Emery and Rosfrith Van de Sand
the complete history of church law, which if they had been going
to seminary would have cost them
hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and they didn't even have to
buy the texts,
although the Van de Sands probably couldn't have gotten admitted
to seminary anyway
even if they'd wanted to; but of that they will doubtless remain
forever unaware.

✪ CAROLINE KNOX's poems have appeared in *Poetry, Anglican Theological Review,* and the *Minnesota Review.*

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Wilhelm von Humboldt

ANTHONY GRAFTON

To the Americans who studied in Germany during the early nineteenth century, Wilhelm von Humboldt stood for all they hoped to find and make their own in Europe. As a scholar, he matched the best German professionals in technical skill and grasp of detail. As a statesman, he showed all the ease, cultivation, and public spirit that most professional scholars lacked. As a reformer of education, he had brought politics and culture into splendidly fruitful contact, creating the research-centered University of Berlin and refounding the Prussian secondary schools on a basis of sound classical teaching.

"I dined today with the late minister, the Baron von Humboldt," wrote George Bancroft in 1820.

> I admire his genius. I am astonished at his erudition. In my company were Professor Bekker and Dr. Schleiermacher. He conversed with them on Greek literature, and was as much at home in the Greek poets as they were, nay better. The Baron is well versed even [in] the poets of the latest ages, and is perfectly acquainted with Tryphiodorus, Nonnus and the like. In his manner too I found him very kind and obliging. He understands the art of talking and converses with ease, dignity, and spirit. In his house everything is neat and elegant; yet nothing of waste or prodigality is to be seen. Noble economy governs in his family.

Both men profited from the meeting, as Paul Sweet shows in his two-volume *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography, 1767–1808; 1808–1835* (Ohio State University Press, $18.50; $25.). Through Bancroft, Humboldt learned of recent American work on Indian languages and came to know the *North American Review*, which fascinated him. From Humboldt, Bancroft took away sensible thoughts on one of his own favorite subjects—how to raise the standards of American education. "An attempt to institute schools in America exactly after the model of the German schools would probably not succeed at all. You would be able to imitate all the forms, and then would be forced to gaze and wonder how it comes that the effects are so different." Throughout the nineteenth century, as hundreds of Americans earned German doctorates and American graduate schools were founded on the German model, Humboldt's name remained familiar and exemplary—even if his advice was often disregarded.

More recently, however, Americans have found it harder to come to terms with Humboldt. His more attractive brother Alexander, the explorer, scientist, and writer, has overshadowed him. This is not surprising. Wilhelm discovered no new species of penguins; more important, he wrote no *Cosmos*. His works actively repel most readers. Their weaving together of ideas and terms from late eighteenth-century aesthetics, linguistics, and anthropology is enough to baffle most scholars trained in the narrow comfort of one modern discipline. Their arguments were difficult and abstract enough to be unattractive even to Humboldt's contemporaries; they are now forbiddingly alien. Many of them in any case remained drafts not meant for publication, pocked with gaps and rough passages. His letters, though far more appealing, are scarcely accessible in English. And though the seventeen volumes of the great Berlin Academy

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edition offer a wealth of texts of all sorts to those lucky enough to have access to them, they are far from complete. Anyone who seriously tries to chase down Humboldt's main treatises and letters soon finds himself adrift in a dusty sea of partial editions, festschrift articles, and odd volumes of scholarly journals.

Those who penetrate the linguistic and bibliographical barbed wire are then confronted with still harder, higher obstacles. Humboldt himself created them. His mind and character seem to elude analysis. Contemporary and modern accounts alike give contradictory impressions of him. He was unattractive, short, and awkward, and he spoke with a bad lisp; yet he talked brilliantly, charming princes and philologists with equal ease. He disliked most Jews, but fought for Jewish rights. He believed that the state should not interfere in the autonomous development of culture, but he left his most enduring monument in the state-controlled universities and *Gymnasien* of Prussia. He insisted that Greek was far superior to any other language, but he studied Oriental and American Indian languages with passion and precision. He found his sexual pleasure in dreaming of women suffering, raped and beaten; but he argued in principle that women should be men's equals, and put the principle into practice in his extraordinary marriage. As a young man, he felt that he was always trying to mask his inner coldness with a pretense of warmth; as an old man, he lamented the contradiction between his cold classical exterior and his suffering Romantic heart: "Bright as the winter sun they called me, they who did not think that I could feel. . . ."

A good many American historians, and dozens of Germans, have tried to solve some of these puzzles. Political historians have charted the stormy, complex course of Humboldt's career in the service of the Prussian state. Historians of political thought have scrutinized line by line his classic, fragmentary attempt to define *The Limits of State Action.* Students of historiography have ruminated on his influential essay "On the Historian's Task." Linguists have reconstructed those features of his technical work that remain of apparent interest from the standpoint of twentieth-century linguistics. Historians and classicists have continued to debate his general views on the study of the ancient world and his practical efforts to create a new form of classical education. And scholars of all sorts continue to find cause for respect and anger in his idea of the university as a place where research must be at the center of the teacher's work.

But recent scholars have not tried to portray Humboldt in the round, even though Matthew Arnold warned long ago that Humboldt's work could never be understood in isolation from his life. Hence the old biography by Rudolf Haym—a powerful book, but prejudiced and built on inadequate sources—has continued to be the standard life. This gap in the modern literature is understandable. The scale of the job is daunting; so is the range of skills it demands. And in any case the imaginative sympathy that a portraitist needs if he is to reveal anything profound about his subject has been lacking. For recent scholars have tended to concentrate on Humboldt's dark side. They have denounced him for the passiveness of his character, for the sadism of his fantasies, for his passage from radical opposition to the state to German nationalism—above all for his belief that culture matters more than politics. They have held him responsible for the collapse of German intellectuals before the illiberalism of the Wilhelmine Empire and the horrors of the Nazi state. Humboldt, the brilliant administrator, horse-trading diplomat, and defender of individual rights, has been made the incongruous ancestor of the unpolitical German.

In his *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography*, Paul Sweet has set out to give the other side of the medal. He has worked with awesome energy through the vast, unruly mass of Humboldt's literary and official writing. He has studied with sympathy Humboldt's lifelong effort—which often went against his emotional grain—to build a marriage of true equals. He has followed the turns of Humboldt's public life and placed them in the general context of the Prussian reform movement. He has interpreted all of this material in the light of his intimate knowledge of German culture and history—knowledge founded while he was a student in Göttingen, enriched by a lifetime of research on the German history of Humboldt's time, and deepened by years of practical work for the American Foreign Service in Germany. The impressive re-

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sult of his labor is a biography that traces, simultaneously and in sharp detail, the threads of Humboldt's emotional, intellectual, and political lives. The book restores the missing eminence of Humboldt to our mental maps of nineteenth-century culture.

The book has its weak points and its longueurs. At times the text bulges with fascinating but irrelevant detail, while pertinent arguments and observations are relegated to the footnotes. At times, too, Humboldt's actions are treated a shade more sympathetically than seems quite fair, though Sweet is by no means uncritical. And one can certainly disagree with him on many points of interpretation—just as he has not hesitated to argue with his distinguished predecessors. But the book will certainly stand as a durable and stimulating introduction to Humboldt and his world.

Humboldt was born to the Prussian state service—that mechanism as florid, complex, and brittle as a Meissen clock, which oversaw all areas of social and economic life, from granting monopolies for growing silkworms to controlling the growth of population, from spreading Enlightenment to censoring the press. His father died when he was young; his beautiful mother was cold and distant. Wilhelm and Alexander studied with tutors on the family estate at Tegel, near Berlin. Unlike most young intellectuals of their time and place, they had no financial worries and never had to support themselves in the traditional, squalid way as schoolmasters or private tutors. But they received little emotional support. What small intellectual stimulus they had came mostly from their tutors and from such minor intellectuals as the Berlin gymnasium teacher J. J. Engel, whose private lectures introduced Wilhelm to the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff.

Like so many bright young Prussian Protestants, Humboldt found himself through contact with Jews. Their Berlin salons, which he began to visit in the 1780s, gave him food for thought and feeling. The works of Moses Mendelssohn, "this truly great philosopher," inspired him to grapple with the problem of proving the existence of God. Henriette Herz led him to introspection and confession. In steamy letters to her, written in up-market Yiddish (German spelled out in Hebrew script), he confided the history of his soul.

In 1787, Wilhelm went to university, at first to the small and old-fashioned establishment at Frankfurt on the Oder. Fortunately his departure from Berlin interrupted neither his mental nor his sentimental education. When Frankfurt proved hopeless, he moved to Göttingen, the most modern of the German universities. There the classicist C. G. Heyne taught him to read Homer historically, in the light of the general development of the Greek language and of Greek society. G. C. Lichtenberg taught him natural philosophy. And on his own he plunged energetically into Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. At the same time, his intimacy with Henriette Herz transformed itself into something richer and more strange. The two of them and two friends, Herz's confidante Brendel Veit and Karl Laroche, formed a society. The members of this *Tugendbund* ("Society for Virtue"), which had curious bylaws and elaborate secret symbols, kissed one another freely and called one another "du." They agreed to work together to attain "moral perfection."

After a visit to revolutionary Paris—which inspired in Humboldt a deeply ambivalent reaction, well described by Sweet—he tried to settle down. But his work in the Prussian judiciary, which he joined, revolted him. He felt he could not even understand the poor criminals he was supposed to judge. Worse still, the tasks of a civil servant made it impossible for him to pursue *Bildung*, the self-cultivation that remained his goal. Where politics interfered with culture, the choice was clear. Humboldt resigned his post—though he stayed formally a member of the Foreign Office—to marry Caroline von Dacheröden, think, and write.

If Humboldt was to be an intellectual, he needed an intellectual task. But this eluded him at first. His essay on *The Limits of State Action* attracted as much criticism as praise from his friends. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which Friedrich von Gentz translated into German, may have dismayed Humboldt by its brilliance. In any event, by mid-1792 Prussia was at war with France. The questions treated in the *Limits* began to seem obsolete; the attitudes expressed in it rapidly became unfashionable. Humboldt left the work unfinished and unpublished.

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It was another student of Heyne, the young Halle professor Friedrich August Wolf, who gave Humboldt's mind the beginnings of its permanent shape. A brilliant lecturer and seminar leader, Wolf was soon to become notorious for his attack on the historicity of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In 1792 he was not famous, but he already had much to teach. His example converted Humboldt to scholarship—to the belief that technical, detailed research should lie at the heart of his intellectual life. Wolf's editions of classical texts, Humboldt wrote in a programmatic review, would serve not only as "complete models" for textual critics, but also as rebuttals to those contemporary thinkers who tried to ridicule learning and precision ("gründliche Genauigkeit"):

> [Wolf] speaks in several passages of his preface, sometimes seriously, sometimes with fine irony, about the custom of despising points of grammar as unimportant details. . . . Certainly in criticism the very smallest points are often closely connected with the most important ones. For to restore the monuments of antiquity so far as possible to their real form, we must not spare even the smallest point that can be of use. . . . In any case, it is hard to say what is really a small point. To one who is used to studying a field of learning (*Wissenschaft*) with a philosophic spirit, no part of it has a separate importance, but each gains its meaning only through its relevance to the whole. A truly ingenious approach differs from a pedantic one not because it hastily bypasses what is apparently unimportant, but because it is constantly directed towards the whole. In learning everything is connected.

For the rest of his life Humboldt aimed at the goal he sketched here: a combination of detailed empirical research and a broad vision of humanistic studies as a coherent whole.

Wolf gave direction as well as definition to Humboldt's interests. He believed—and constantly argued in his lectures—that true education must consist not in the "useful studies" favored by the *philosophes*, but rather in immersion in ancient—especially Greek—literature and culture. Humboldt soon realized that he had begun too late to become a professional philologist, but under Wolf's influence he nonetheless decided to make "classical antiquity, preeminently the Greeks, my exclusive preoccupation." And he set to work on a series of projects meant to give a precise account of the meaning and uses of Greek culture.

In a general sketch of "The Study of Classical Antiquity," Humboldt argued that to develop one's full powers in a harmonious and balanced way one had to know in general what human nature had been and could be. No one could hope to study the human condition in all times and places at a proper level of rigor and detail. Hence the sensible man in search of *Bildung* should concentrate on the Greeks, the most independent, sensitive, and creative of the nations that had developed high civilizations. By studying "less [literary] works themselves than their authors and the periods from which they came," one could "work out the character and complete situation of the Greeks," setting each product of Greek art into its full political, social, biographical, and intellectual context and arriving in the end at a "true, philosophical knowledge of man." By making this enormous effort to know the Greeks well, one would necessarily come to resemble them. Thus the comprehensive re-creation of "human nature in antiquity"—a phrase Humboldt borrowed from Wolf—was the best means toward the improvement of human nature in modern times.

Humboldt's views had a sharpness and sophistication usually denied to works on educational theory, a field often given over to empty rhetoric and optimistic generalizations. If he idealized the Greeks, he knew that his view of them derived from a limited selection of evidence and needed correction:

> I've read [he wrote to Wolf in January 1793] for the most part poets and bits from the historians and Plato—all writers who lead to a very idealized view. Those who would do the opposite—for example, Aristophanes—I still have not studied at all.

If he laid impossible hopes on the power of classical studies to improve the human condition, he also understood many of the practical difficulties involved in forging a curriculum of the sort he hoped for. He warned that reading modern books on Greek culture would not yield the right sort of knowledge: "If such a work tries to be completely accurate, it cannot have a sufficiently original point of view; if it tries to be completely orig-

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inal, it will lack accuracy." And he knew that no one could ever achieve full mastery of ancient life and thought. It was "the effort to attain such knowledge" which "could be called essential for any man; for no one can hope to complete this search."

Moreover, unlike many of those who have written on the classical tradition and its meaning, Humboldt applied his principles in detailed studies of ancient sources. In a series of translations from Pindar and the tragedians, he tested and improved his knowledge of Greek, working especially to master and reproduce in German the complexities of the Greek meters. While he never completed his projected cultural history of Greece, he did produce in German the complexities of the its fragmentary state: a treatment of Pindar that combined aesthetic analysis of his poems' structure and style with careful historical attention to his character, the culture of his Boeotian home, and the precise situations in which his hymns were written and performed. Humboldt long continued to ponder and write essays about the meaning of Greek history—above all, a long and subtle treatment of the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Greek Free States" in which, inspired by the collapse of Prussia in 1806, he tried to show that the political failure of the Greek cities had been intimately connected with their cultural greatness: "The Greeks possessed a nature too noble, tender, free and humane to construct a political constitution that would necessarily limit their individuality."

Protean as ever, though, and ever inclined to abandon his projects, Humboldt soon gave up his exclusive dedication to the Greeks. He read Greek texts with Caroline, and responded in detail to the galley proofs of Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, which he was the first to see. But much of his energy went elsewhere. Living in Jena during the mid-1790s, he watched and took part in the literary life of classic Weimar. He knew Schiller and Goethe well, and contributed elaborate, idiosyncratic essays on the differences between the sexes to Schiller's journal, *Die Horen*. But none of this satisfied him or his readers. Kant admitted that he could not "unriddle" the *Horen* essays; Fichte threatened to sue anyone who took *him* to be the author.

In late 1796 Humboldt's goal was still a comprehensive "knowledge and judgment of the human character in its different forms." But he had given up hope of reaching it through "historical investigations of the ancient world." For these, he now admitted, he lacked "the critical habit of mind that draws not too much and not too little from each fact." Instead he would undertake two related projects: a comprehensive "characteristic" of the eighteenth century, and a comparative anthropology which would "set out against one another the spiritual organisms of different classes of men and individuals, as in comparative anatomy one compares the physical organisms of men and animals with one another." Once this new science was formed and mastered, he would be able to grasp all the gifts and possibilities of human nature. Richness and diversity were what he hoped to find: "to search out all the different ways in which man can form himself, not that any one form is less valuable than another."

Humboldt's new science proved as unsatisfying as his new philology. But in a journey to France and Spain that began in 1797—so, at least, most scholars claim—he found at last the Ariadne thread that he had needed. It was the languages of the Spanish and the Basques that fascinated him:

> I'm interested above all in the language, which really has great merits. I feel that I will devote myself even more exclusively in future to the study of language, and that I am now, after some years of serious study, perhaps able to undertake a thorough and philosophical comparison of several languages. I have learned much more about modern languages since leaving Germany. For now, however, I will limit myself to the languages derived from Latin and the history of their origin.

Not a general anthropology, then, but a philosophical inquiry into language—this was the long-missing key to human nature. So Humboldt himself said often, notably in a famous letter to Wolf in 1804:

> Essentially everything I work on—even the Pindar—is linguistic. I believe that I have found the art of using language as a vehicle on which to voyage through the heights and depths and variety of the whole world. And I steep myself more and more in this opinion.

At last Humboldt knew the sort of scholar he wanted to be.

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Humboldt's discovery of language has long been a major chapter in the heroic history of language forged by German scholarship during the nineteenth century. As Winckelmann discovered the historical evolution of ancient art, the Schlegels that of Greek and Indian literature, and Savigny that of Roman law, so Humboldt first grasped that language could only be understood historically: as a process, not a finished product; as a living, changing organism which no set of static rules could describe adequately. Like the other founders of the Historical School, Humboldt came to his bit of undiscovered intellectual country not by mere research in books (and certainly not by reading the numerous but trivial eighteenth-century works on language), but through experience—in his case the experience of Spain, which certainly did move and delight him. The story has sometimes been amended in detail, but rarely altered in substance.

But as scholars not wedded to it—notably Hans Aarsleff and Henry Hoenigswald—have begun to show, the story is not history but myth—or at best the sort of textbook-preface history that scientists and other practitioners of technical disciplines sometimes impose upon their fields in order to justify present conditions. In fact, many of the central ideas in Humboldt's linguistics were neither new nor German. He took them from the lively eighteenth-century tradition of debate on language—a tradition which was well established on German soil, since the origins and nature of language were much discussed in the Berlin Academy, but which in its origins was British and French. When Humboldt argued in 1797 that "absolutely nothing is so important for a nation's culture as its language" and in 1828 that "languages are the true images of the modes in which nations think and combine their ideas," he was not breaking out of the shell of facile abstractions in which the *philosophes* had imprisoned the study of language. Rather he was echoing the words of the dominant French theorist, Condillac: "Everything goes to show that each language expresses the character of the people that speaks it." When Humboldt mused, in a famous passage, that in one sense everyone possesses his own language, since "no one when he uses a word has in mind exactly the same thing as another"—here too he was developing the views of Condillac: "One need only study a man for some time in order to learn his language. I say *his language*, for each has his own, as his passions dictate." Humboldt's discovery of the relativity of languages ("das Weltbild der Sprache") was less a German breakthrough than the reworking of a rich vein in French thought.

How Humboldt took these positions, and what his chief direct sources were, we do not know in detail. As early as 1792–93 he argued that the Greek language was a principal tool for students of Greek culture as a whole. Since it was fundamentally pure and original with the Greeks—that is, not largely derived from an earlier language of high culture—it was the direct expression of their nature. His unfinished sketch for a treatment of the language ends: "Here some examples of the formation, inflection, and combination of words could show the correspondence between the Greeks' language and their character."

Humboldt's more learned friend Wolf drew on the same largely French tradition and took a similar line. The ancient languages, he told his students, "are not mere tools, but are characteristic of the nation." He too presented language as a vehicle for mastering all the richness of human nature:

> Each language contains the forms, in accordance with which the people developed their ideas. To that extent the study of language is a good aid to the broadest possible combination and completion of our own ideas. Thus every language must have its own treasures, as determined by the political, moral and other conditions of the nations in which it prevailed. The more these conditions differ from one another, the greater the treasures must be.

Wolf and Humboldt were by no means the only Germans to follow this anthropological line of inquiry. So had Wolf's Göttingen teacher Michaelis; so had the Berlin pastor Jenisch, whose "Philosophical and Critical Comparison and Evaluation of Fourteen Ancient and Modern European Languages" won a prize set by the Berlin Academy in 1794.

True, these linguistic interests fell into the background of Humboldt's thought during the mid-1790s. His plan for a comparative science of man laid no special stress on language. But the experience of Paris—as vital for Humboldt as for the Schlegels—brought language back to center stage. Here he met

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the Ideologues, those elegantly uniformed members of the Institut National des Sciences et Arts, characteristic figures of the Directory, who spent much of their time debating and developing Condillac's ideas. Humboldt held informal discussions and systematic seminars with them. For their metaphysics he had little use. For their theories on language, too, he professed little respect. He described Condillac's *Traité des animaux* as "an important work, because it puts the superficiality of Condillac's system in full light." But we must watch what Humboldt did as well as what he said. He read Condillac's chief works in a month's time in 1798 and took uncharacteristically detailed notes on them. And he learned much from conversation as well. As early as 1797—well before he went to Spain—he was already sure that language was the key to culture. What Humboldt could add to Condillac was not philosophical depth so much as philological precision and empirical evidence. That he did not acknowledge his debts will not surprise anyone experienced in the study of intellectual history. That later German students of Humboldt did not uncover his borrowings from the French will be even less surprising to anyone acquainted with the politics of scholarship in nineteenth-century Europe.

From now on, at all events, Humboldt knew what he was about. He still worked at an alarming variety of fields and projects. His political career—which became active again in 1802, when he went to Rome as Prussian Resident, and continued to be so for almost twenty years—often interfered with his studies. But he had largely thrown off the sense of drift and failure that dogged him in his early years. He worked hard at collecting linguistic materials: texts and grammars for Basque, Icelandic, Gaelic, Chinese, Japanese, the American Indian languages. And now that he knew the direction his intellectual formation must take, he found himself more effective and at ease in politics as well. He suffered much: from the death of his much-loved eldest son, from imagined slights at the hands of his king, from his failure to reach the very highest political offices. Occasionally he still had moods of depression and indecision. But for the most part he accepted his experiences with all the openness and zest that he had called for in his early works on *Bildung*. Culture and politics were no longer at cross-purposes.

In fact, Humboldt's scholarship lay behind his most effective and original period of political action. During 1809–10, as director of the section for ecclesiastical affairs and education in the Ministry of the Interior, he redesigned the entire Prussian system of education and scholarship. The reform had long been needed, and long called for. In the late eighteenth century, attempts had been made to revise elementary teaching along Pestalozzian lines. Ernesti, Heyne, Wolf, and other professors of classical philology had tried to raise the standard of Greek and Latin teaching in the schools. They made their seminars into training institutes for teachers, insisting that each member give practice lessons and so learn how to think through and present a text. Von Zedlitz, a reforming minister of the 1780s, had supported Wolf at Halle, seen to the establishment of an *Oberschulkollegium* (a state body that oversaw the secondary schools), and created the *Abitur* (a state-run examination to be taken at the end of one's secondary studies). Göttingen outside Prussia, Halle within it had given examples of how the university curriculum could be modernized and made attractive to students of high birth. By the end of the century, a small but influential group within the bureaucracy had come to argue that *Bildung*, not birth, should be the criterion for advancement in the state service. During and after the collapse of the old Prussian warfare state, finally, many prominent intellectuals had called for a new German brand of scholarship, which would avenge the state's material defeat with a victory in the realm of the spirit.

With much help from his associate Süvern, Humboldt tried to answer these demands. The two men started to reorganize the elementary schools, creating a system of teacher training to replace the semiliterate craftsmen and ministers who had often run village schools with competent professionals. They developed a system for certifying *Gymnasium* teachers by stiff general examinations. They created a new university at Berlin. Above all, they tried to link all these levels of instruction with a common body of ideals. Education should be, at least at the lowest levels, accessible to all. Training in languages, mathematics, and history at the *Gymnasium*

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should give the student a solid foundation of learning and method. Properly conducted, the study of "the form of a language *as form*"—rather than mere grammatical drill—would develop all the student's faculties: "It clears up the head and exercises the memory and the imagination." At the university, finally, the philosophical faculty—whose traditional, humble role had been to prepare students for the higher professional studies of law, medicine, and theology—should be the central and dominant site of teaching. Here direct work with professors would enable the student to participate in the discovery of new knowledge. In each case the end of learning was not a mass of facts but a properly formed mind. In each case vocational training was subordinated to the attainment of *Bildung*. In each case the individual's bent was to be respected; even at the *Gymnasium*, Greek was not to be a requirement for all. This new general education would produce the sort of flexible, cultivated intellectuals and officials that Prussia needed and that the old specialized universities and knights' academies had failed to produce.

This noble program ran into many obstacles in practice. Frederick William, always suspicious of reform and reformers, gave teachers and professors far less freedom than Humboldt had hoped, and rejected many of his requests and suggestions. The classical curriculum of the *Gymnasium* had far more drill than philosophy. The University of Berlin was not made independent by endowment. The advisory committees of scholars and officials that Humboldt had created as a check to too much state interference in education were abolished after his departure from office. And the system was by no means equally accessible to the talented of all classes. The new educational system, instead of presiding at the birth of a new social order, helped to preserve and strengthen an old one.

Yet the high German standards of technical competence, regulated by uniform tests, became the envy of Europe for a century to come. At the worst, Humboldt's ideals remained a benchmark by which later reformers and rebels could judge the illiberal realities of German culture. And the extraordinary team of professors that he assembled in Berlin did create an intellectual revolution. In the first years of the university, Savigny lectured on law; Wolf, Boeckh, and Spalding on philology; Schleiermacher on philosophy; Niebuhr on the early history of Rome. These men, mostly young and passionate, were confined to Berlin and to political inactivity by the French occupation. They poured their energies into their lectures and met informally in a philological seminar. Together they created a disciplined and philosophical brand of scholarship and invested it with more glamour and excitement than even Humboldt could have hoped for. "It was the best of times," Niebuhr later wrote, "that of the founding of Berlin University. The enthusiasm and happiness in which the months passed, when the contents of the first volumes of [my] history took shape as lectures and as a finished work—to have enjoyed these and to have experienced 1813 is enough to make a man's life happy despite many sad experiences."

These men offered their students the sort of comprehensive historical insight into ancient culture that Humboldt and Wolf had believed in. Wolf lectured and wrote brilliantly on the general structure of philology. Schleiermacher, as Niebuhr wrote—not without reservations—did "not content himself with bare notices of the various philosophical teachers; he brings them into connection, and endeavors to trace out the fundamental idea of each of the ancient philosophers." And Niebuhr, whose lecture course on early Rome seemed "exemplary" to Savigny, also tried to practice philology as "the art of carrying ourselves back intuitively, with complete mastery, into the lost world of antiquity, as if we lived then; lived, not just looked backwards towards it."

Humboldt had less pleasure than one might expect from his stint as *Bildungsdiktator*. "Governing scholars is not much better than being in charge of a troupe of actors," he grumbled before taking on the job. Experience bore out expectation. Scholars, he wrote to Caroline in May 1810, were "of all men the unruliest and hardest to satisfy. . . . With their eternally conflicting interests, their jealousy, their envy, their desire to rule, their prejudices, according to which each thinks that only his subject deserves support and encouragement, they besiege me."

Anyone with experience of academic committees will sympathize. Moreover, even Ber-

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lin did not live up to Humboldt's hopes and programs. Wolf proved a disappointment, soon losing his powers as a teacher. The growing dominance of Hegel and the growth of more and more specialized fields of study, whose proponents took less and less interest in general issues, were not what he had had in mind.

Yet his tradition never died out. August Boeckh, who taught philology at Berlin for more than fifty years, never ceased urging his students to see Greek life as a whole. They must master—so Jacob Burckhardt recorded in his lecture notes—"history of customs, history of religion, history of learning, history of art, history of the state, history of language." If they went about this task properly, they would see that "the *Bildung* of the Greeks was completely and essentially harmonious." And they would become aware of deep and poignant contrasts between Greek and modern civilization. Thus Humboldt's general questions were never completely removed from the curriculum, and his favorite subjects, classical philology and comparative linguistics, always enjoyed the high esteem and high rewards that he had wanted for them. Naturally, Humboldt's success in imposing his views was limited; educational programs are always altered by the social, political, and cultural conditions of the societies on which they are imposed. Yet he was probably the most successful educational administrator of modern times. It is a point worth pondering that he had never been to school, had had only a brief experience of university life, and had never taught.

But if Humboldt's cultural ideals inspired some of his political acts, their purest expression was in his own work as scholar and writer. This occupied him even in the darkest and busiest of times. As he and the great Greek scholar Gottfried Hermann walked over the corpse-littered battlefield at Leipzig, they discussed textual problems in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. "You see, my dear friend," Humboldt remarked, "empires fall, as we see here, but a good verse lasts forever." After 1820 he was largely done with politics (though not entirely so, as is sometimes said; once he intervened so forcefully against government policy in the *Staatsrat* that the king felt he had to suspend meetings for six months). Settled at Tegel, working in his great library, surrounded by his family and the Greek and Roman statues he had collected in Italy, Humboldt enjoyed an Indian summer in his last years. He finished scholarly works on a large scale, above all his great treatise, "On the Kawi-Language on the Island of Java." He gave short, lucid accounts of his ideas in lectures to the Berlin Academy. He re-created in general essays of great skill his Jena years in the 1790s, "when I was living in happy domesticity with Schiller and Goethe." Goethe, still active at eighty-one, was delighted by Humboldt's historical insight. "It is remarkable how he animates and stirs up everything, how he immerses himself in the cirumstances as they were there at that time, and observes me as I then was." It is a pleasure to think of the two old giants recognizing one another's talents and achievements with such freedom and generosity.

As for Humboldt's views on language, they notoriously defy summary. As Otto Jespersen dryly remarked, "It is not surprising that his admirer and follower, Heymann Steinthal, in a series of books, gave as many different interpretations of Humboldt's thoughts, each purporting to be more correct than its predecessors." Only a series of translations and commentaries, built on the solid foundations laid by Steinthal, would really make Humboldt's views accessible. Instead of offering one more potted summary, I shall give a brief account of one short work; this will provide a direct, if inadequate, taste of Humboldt's qualities.

Humboldt's translation of the *Agamemnon*, which appeared in 1816, had long been a favorite among his projects. He had help on textual and metrical problems from Wolf and Hermann. He reworked his German version time and again. And his introduction to the play is a small masterpiece in mixed media, hard to classify in modern terms but easy to appreciate.

Humboldt described his work as intended to represent the original simply and accurately. To be accurate, however, it had to be philologically sound. Hence it had to be based not on an arbitrarily emended Greek text but on a coherent new recension:

> I have always hated the eclectic way in which translators arbitrarily choose among the hundreds of variant MS readings and conjectural emenda-

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tions, following a subjective feeling which must often lead them astray. To edit an ancient writer is to restore a work, if not to its true and original form, at least to the earliest state that we can reach. It must therefore be done with historical rigor and scrupulousness, with all the relevant scholarly equipment, and above all with thoroughgoing consistency, and it must be the product of a single mind.

Short technical notes by Hermann explained the innovations in the text. But if Humboldt's method was elaborately philological, his goals were philosophical and literary: "to increase the significance and expressiveness" of German. This sort of literary project needed help from technical linguistics; to improve one language it was necessary to understand the mechanisms of language in general. These Humboldt described with concision and delicacy, refusing to treat either language or culture as merely dependent on and limited by the other:

It is the wonderful property of languages that all of them are immediately sufficient for the ordinary needs of life. But then the spirit of the nation that uses them can raise them to an infinitely higher and more complex level. It is not too bold to say that in every dialect—even those of very primitive peoples, which we still do not know well enough—everything, the highest and deepest, strongest and most tender things can be expressed. . . . But these tones sleep, as in a musical instrument not played, until the nation knows how to evoke them.

German culture and the German language had already reached a high level of power and expressiveness. Hence they were ready to receive what Greek could offer. Real translations would charge the existing German system of symbols with a "higher, deeper, more tender meaning":

So the language, without really visible alteration, is raised to a higher meaning, and expanded to one that manifests itself more diversely. But as the sense of the language is extended, so is the sense of the nation.

For a translation to have this effect, however, strict conditions had to be fulfilled. Above all, the translator must not try to write "as the original writer would have written in the translator's language." By doing this, the French had managed to translate all the Greek and Roman writers without infusing their nation "with even a particle of the ancient spirit." Rather, the translator must strive to keep "a certain tinge of strangeness" in his work—not enough to put the reader off, but enough to convey something of the richness and foreignness of "the ancient spirit."

Accuracy of this refined sort, in turn, could only be attained by intensive application of a historical method. Humboldt bent himself to experience the play *Agamemnon* as Aeschylus's audience had. He rightly saw that they would have connected the action Aeschylus portrayed with some of their central institutions—notably the Areopagus, which Athena founded to try Orestes. He worked hard to avoid any anachronisms in his approach to the text. As Eduard Fraenkel has shown, scholars from Hellenistic Egypt to enlightened Germany had objected to one glaring error on Aeschylus's part: that he apparently made Agamemnon reappear in Mycenae within a day after leaving Troy. Humboldt rejected this complaint as resting on unhistorical assumptions—on notions of logical consistency alien to classical poetry and art:

The question could not even arise in a poet of Aeschylus's time. And in his idea of a tragedy there is no contradiction involved in having Agamemnon and his army appear at once, without therefore giving an account of the length or shortness of their journey. Ancient works of art very often make no effort to connect the individual components of what they portray by visible means and in accordance with the normal action of nature. The visual arts enjoy the same freedom. It is much the same when horses are portrayed on bas-reliefs and engraved gems, moving at full speed before the chariot, with no indication at all of the harness.

Here Humboldt's historical and aesthetic senses work together. Instead of tearing the play to pieces in a search for its lost sources—or criticizing it for failure to meet some universal artistic standard—he uses his comprehensive understanding of context to enhance his feeling for the text as text. It would be hard to imagine a more effective combination of detailed research and "a philosophical spirit" "constantly directed towards the whole." No wonder Humboldt's version in-

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spired Goethe to reflect with power and originality on the structure of the play—and helped inspire K. O. Müller to create his far more detailed reconstruction of exactly what the *Eumenides* had meant to its original audience, scene by scene and emotion by emotion.

Yet in the end it would be wrong to pretend that we can understand Humboldt fully. His sensibility combines—with an ease alien to us—a generous openness to all forms of life and a strong tendency always to experience life in the terms laid down by books. "It was the first battlefield that I had seen," Humboldt wrote to Caroline from Leipzig, "and I am only now really able to grasp it. A great number of bodies were still lying there, most of them partly or completely stripped; often several were piled on one another. Most lay on their faces with arms outstretched. This teaches one the real meaning of Homer's phrase 'to bite the earth.' "

His ability to be at once a passionate optimist and a detached cynic, a self-obsessed introvert and a public-spirited statesman, master of detail and sketcher of encyclopedic proposals, marks him out as a German of the 1790s, larger and more contradictory than life. He was a worthy member of a world that was largely lost by 1835, when Boeckh proclaimed that Humboldt's death would open "a chasm between the past and the future." Boeckh feared that in his own age of little men no one would be able to imitate Humboldt's breadth of mind and action. In our time of littler men still, it seems impossible for anyone even to study all sides of Humboldt's life and thought. Yet we should try. Humboldt would have been the first to agree that one can only profit from trying to grasp those past realities that are most elusive.

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The Struggle for Linguistic Hegemony, 1780–1980

CHARLES ISSAWI

In its issue of January 26, 1980, the *Economist* carried the following comment: "After a long struggle, the French seem to have abandoned their efforts to stem the rising tide of the English language.... The government has quietly endorsed a plan which calls for an end to the competition with English.... His [Jacques Rigaud's] report, approved by senior cabinet ministers last month, recognized that, compared with English, French has come to look old-fashioned."

If this account is correct—and I am inclined to doubt it, having sat through many long sessions at the United Nations in which the French delegates criticized at length the inadequacy of the French translations of documents and the insufficient use of French at the UN—it marks the end of a long rivalry, at first latent and then overt and conscious, between the English and French languages for world supremacy. For more than two hundred years English has been gaining ground in business and science, but only since the First World War has it taken its place alongside French as the language of diplomacy and international culture. Other languages have achieved temporary preeminence in certain fields. Italian was for several centuries the lingua franca of the Mediterranean; the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji, concluded by the Russians and Ottomans in 1774, was in Italian, and in certain parts of the Levant Italian was replaced by French only in the nineteenth century, during which German became the language of scholarship. But so far none has been able to challenge French or English as an international language.

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A convenient point at which to start the study of this competition is Antoine de Rivarol's prizewinning essay *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française,* a subject set by the Academy of Berlin in 1783. The time and place are symbolic. Berlin was the capital of Frederick the Great, an ardent admirer of French culture, who wrote French verse, is reported to have said that Shakespeare was for "Redskins," and did not have much more use for German literature. Rivarol's was by no means the first essay of its kind—one can refer to Henri Estienne's *De la précellence du langage française,* written in the sixteenth century, Jean Le Laboureur's *Avantages de la langue française sur la langue latine* (1667), and other works—but it is the most complete and convincing.

In his attempt to explain how French became the leading language of Europe, Rivarol passes in review its potential rivals and shows their shortcomings. Some of these relate to sonority: German and English are too guttural, Spanish too bombastic, Italian too soft. Others relate to vocabulary: thus German is too far removed from Latin to be acceptable to the rest of Europe. Still others relate to syntax—English syntax is odd and obscure—or to the spirit of the language. But the main reasons for the preponderance of French have been geographic, historical, political, social, and economic. German and Italian were handicapped by the disunity of their countries, and in addition Italy suffered from devastating invasions and the diversion of trade routes in the sixteenth century. The language of Spain, along with other aspects of its society, went into decline at the end of that century. The florescence of Italian literature was too early; it came before Europe was ready for it. That of England was too tardy: "From Chaucer until Shakespeare and Milton nothing transpires in this famous island, and

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its literature is not worth a glance." Shakespeare and Milton were not appreciated in their own country for nearly two centuries [*sic*], and by the time England began to shine in letters (Pope, Addison, Dryden) and in thought (Locke, Newton) it was too late: France had taken an unchallengeable lead.

For the French language had been favored by a wide variety of powerful factors—by its euphony and clarity ("*what is not clear is not French;* what is not clear is still English, Italian, Greek or Latin") and by its early unity, derived from the triumph of the Picard dialect which made it such an excellent instrument of prose ("and it is prose that gives a language domination"). French also benefited from its slow evolution over a thousand years. Already by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the language had reached a high level of perfection and, after the aberrant exuberance of Ronsard and other sixteenth-century poets, attained its final form under Malherbe. By then France had achieved primacy in a number of fields: military, political, and economic. (Indeed Rivarol could have emphasized much more strongly than he did that seventeenth-century France was a giant among nations. It was situated at the heart of Western Europe, between all the countries that counted: Spain, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany. Its population of 20 million compared with about 15 million for Germany, 13 million for Italy, 10 million for Spain and Portugal, and 9 million for the British Isles. Its manufacturing and agricultural outputs were easily the largest in Europe and so was its trade. From the defeat of the Spaniards at Rocroi in 1643 until Blenheim in 1704, French armies were unbeaten. And French political power was commensurate with its economic and military strength.) Louis XIV made Paris the center of Europe and his court was illuminated by a matchless galaxy: Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Descartes, Pascal, and others. "Enfin l'Europe, lasse d'admirer et d'envier, voulut imiter: c'était un nouvel hommage"; and French customs and culture spread across the continent. The task was rendered easier by the French character—gay, gracious, pleasant, and polite, in contrast to the dry, taciturn, impatient English: "One can no more succeed in boring a Frenchman than in diverting an Englishman."

In the eighteenth century, although France suffered political misfortunes, its literature was enriched by Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopedists, and its attractiveness thereby further enhanced. Rivarol's essay concludes on a very hopeful note: "We still live on their glory, and we shall maintain it." Meanwhile "England, which witnessed our successes, does not share them. Her last war against us leaves her under the double eclipse of her literature and preponderance, and that war gave Europe a great spectacle: in it, we have seen a free people led by England to slavery and brought back to liberty by a young monarch. The history of America can henceforth be reduced to three periods: strangled by Spain, oppressed by England, and saved by France."

Rivarol's general picture is not overdrawn. Imitation Versailles had grown up in Schoenbrunn, Potsdam, and elsewhere; French was spoken by the upper classes in Poland and Russia, and French literature set the tone for the whole of Europe. One example, from just beyond the threshold of Europe, is suggestive. In 1809 the British ambassador in Constantinople apologized to George Canning for having drawn a treaty with Turkey in French. But, he explained, "Even if the negotiations had been carried on at Constantinople I should have found no Dragoman employed by the Porte sufficiently master of the English language to render himself responsible for affixing the signature of the Turkish Plenipotentiary to an instrument of so much importance." It may be added that in the archives in Vienna the correspondence between the Austrian Foreign Office and the Austrian ambassador at Constantinople, for the years 1800–60, is almost entirely in French.

Several forces, however, were altering the balance between French and English; five were already at work when Rivarol wrote his essay, and a sixth was to explode a few years later. First there was the founding of the French empire in Africa, which in the eighteenth century consisted only of a few trading posts in Senegal but was eventually to produce several millions of francophones. Second, and far more powerful, was the French Revolution, followed by the Napoleonic conquests, which in many ways helped to spread the French language and culture. There was

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the large-scale emigration of noblemen and royalists, thousands of whom earned a living as teachers of French in various parts of Europe or America, while others—like Rivarol himself—wrote and published abroad in French, and still others put to use the military or civilian skills they had acquired at home. They were followed some twenty years later by demobilized officers and soldiers from Napoleon's armies, who offered their services in many parts of the world, including Turkey, Egypt, and places farther east. French armies marched all over Europe, and their presence must have had on many a youngster the intoxicating effect described by Heinrich Heine in *Das Buch Le Grand.* In the countries annexed by France, the inhabitants had more solid inducements to learn its language.

But perhaps the most powerful stimulus to the preeminence of French was that it became, and remained for more than a century, the language of revolution and the inspiration of national liberation—even where, as in Spain, Germany, and elsewhere, liberation was directed against French rule. In his *Thoughts on French Affairs,* Edmund Burke had this to say about the revolutionary newspapers: "There are thirty of them in Paris alone. The language diffuses them more widely than the English, though the English too are much read. . . . They are like a battery, in which the stroke of any one ball produces no great effect, but the amount of continual repetition is decisive. Let us only suffer any person to tell us his story, morning and evening, but for one twelve month, and he will become our master."

While France thus captured at one stroke the imagination and sympathy of the Left, the factors that had earlier ensured its primacy in the upper circles of society continued to operate: the political and economic strength of France; its dazzling literary, artistic, and, for a long time, scientific activity; and the unique attraction of Paris and its way of life. To this day French has held its place as the language of good food, good wine, and lovemaking. In the nineteenth century, French spread well beyond the confines of Europe, becoming the leading cultural language of Latin America and the Near and Middle East. One is accustomed to think of French as the language of the elite in the Balkans, Turkey, the Levant, Egypt, and Iran. But it comes as a surprise to learn that French was the predominant language in Iraq, which was so strongly under British commercial and political influence. The British consul in Baghdad stated in February 1905 that "in Baghdad almost every educated man can speak and understand French." A month later, however, he was to report that the head of the French-backed Jewish Schools (Alliance Israélite) wanted to introduce English at Baghdad and Basra. "They find it necessary for commercial purposes."

Commerce was indeed tipping the scales in favor of English, but it operated together with industry and empire. Rivarol had of course noticed England's commercial activity, "ramified in the four parts of the world"; he regarded it as a source of weakness, since Britain could be wounded in a thousand different ways, "and it is never wanting for causes of war." But during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, British sea power destroyed French overseas trade and gave Britain a commanding lead which it was not to lose until the middle of the present century. In 1840, the United Kingdom accounted for about one-third of world trade, compared to one-tenth for France and one-twelfth for the United States, and by 1870 its share had risen to 40 percent, slowly declining thereafter. This was partly due to British maritime supremacy; in 1850 Britain owed 52 percent of the world's merchant navy, and as late as 1910 the figure was still as high as 46 percent. English soon became the main language of maritime navigation, and is now used almost exclusively in air traffic all over the world.

But Britain's trade owed even more to the Industrial Revolution, which it pioneered and carried to maturity. In 1840–50 Britain produced a half, or more, of the world's output of machine-made cotton textiles, iron, and coal; owned well over a third of the world's railways and steam-powered machinery; and was by far the largest producer of engineering products and builder of railways. It was only natural, therefore, that the language of the "workshop of the world" should become that of technology. And since British science was ahead of that of any other country (except, for some decades, Germany, and later the United States), English also became the leading scientific language. In addition, En-

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glish began to make small inroads into the stronghold of French: the domain of letters and polite society. One can contrast the exclusive use of French in the aristocratic circles of Saint Petersburg in *War and Peace* with the anglicisms that crop up in *Anna Karenina;* it is well known that Tolstoy was deeply influenced by Dickens, though he had his reservations regarding Shakespeare, Thackeray, and George Eliot. Still earlier, the English Romantics had made their mark on all European literatures, including French. For instance, it is interesting to contrast Rivarol's condescending remarks about Shakespeare with Hugo's unbounded admiration for him. Down to the present day, English literature, science, and arts have flourished with undiminished vitality, and one can surmise that its far larger vocabulary has also helped the English language to forge ahead of French.

The change had not passed unnoticed. In 1873 the distinguished Swiss scientist, Alphonse de Candolle, in his *Histoire des sciences et des savants depuis deux siècles,* indulged in some linguistic futurology and raised the question of which modern language would be scientifically "dominant in the Twentieth Century." His answer was clear. English had the right mixture of Germanic and Latin words and structures, would soon be spoken by a majority of the civilized world, and was "adapted to modern tendencies," more specifically technology, science, and business. By 1970, "the English language will have advanced from 77 to 860 millions. The German language will have advanced from 62 to 124 millions. The French language will have advanced from 40½ to 69½ millions. The French and German languages will then have the same relationship to English as Dutch and Swedish now have to them." His estimate for French was a little too low, for German a little too high, and for English much too high.

In this context, if a digression is permissible, a paradox in the attitude of the British toward the French language and literature may be noted. On the one hand, until the present century France was their traditional enemy, the country with which England was most often at war. England's finest patriotic poetry, such as some of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, was inspired by conflict with France. But French has penetrated and formed the English language more deeply than any modern European language has affected another. True, Arabic has had a similar impact on Persian and Turkish, and there may be other examples outside Europe. Yet with the possible exception of Italian in the sixteenth century, French has always been the foreign language studied by the greatest number of Englishmen, and French literature the one most familiar to them. In 1915 Robert Bridges composed his anthology *The Spirit of Man,* using both English and French selections, and it is difficult to think of any other modern European bilingual anthology.

But both British trade and the English language were helped by the spread of the empire. Unnoticed by Rivarol—or at least not mentioned in his essay—a sizable part of India had already come under British domination, and with the elimination of French influence it was only a matter of time before the whole subcontinent would find itself under British rule. With such a large base of operations, British trade and finance spread all over the Far East, and English became by far the most widely used European language in Asia. Yet what was to be the most powerful force in spreading the English language was casually mentioned by Rivarol, without the least awareness of its relevance to the subject he was studying, at the end of his essay: the British emigrants who had just formed the United States of America. David Hume had been much more perspicacious. In 1767 he had advised Edward Gibbon, who had written a history of the Swiss Confederation in fluent French, to write his projected book on Rome in English. "Why do you compose in French and carry faggots into the woods, as Horace says with regard to Romans who wrote in Greek? I grant that you have a like motive to those Romans, and adopt a language much more generally diffused than your native tongue: but have you not remarked the fate of those two ancient languages in following ages? . . . Let the French, therefore, triumph in the present diffusion of their tongue. Our solid and increasing establishments in America, where we need less dread the inundation of Barbarians, promise a superior stability and duration to the English language."

In contrast, the spread of French was

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greatly restricted by the low birthrate and population pressure in France, and by the reluctance of the French—compared to the British, Spaniards, Portuguese, Russians, and Chinese—to emigrate from their beautiful and fertile country. Even France's pursuit of "demographic colonization," as in Algeria and Tunisia, was unsuccessful and most of the "pieds noir" were of Spanish, Italian, and Maltese origin, though completely gallicized in culture.

The first effect of the growth of the United States was to double the number of English-speaking people to some 75 million by 1870, or about twice the number of francophones, and today the United States accounts for some two-thirds of the total number of anglophones. Second, American trade with the Far East, though far smaller than British, helped to spread English in that region; the same was true, somewhat later, of American trade with, and investment in, Latin America. But the worldwide cultural impact of English did not assume significance until after the First World War, and only began to exert its full force in the 1940s, as the United States rose to economic, military, political, and scientific preeminence.

American participation in the First World War ensured that English would be used, along with French, as an official language at the Peace Conference. American industry was already the world's largest by the 1880s; in the 1920s, and once more in the 1940s and 1950s, it accounted for more than 40 percent of total world output—a figure comparable to that of Britain a century earlier. Eventually the United States became the largest trading nation, and world financial leadership passed from London to New York. Americans forged ahead in science and technology; American universities rose to the first rank and, by their sheer number, exerted a far greater influence than those of any other nation. American literature, music, and painting evoked worldwide attention and interest. The effect of all these achievements was multiplied by a lavish United States exchange policy—which not only helped its own citizens to study abroad but enabled foreigners to enroll or reside in its universities and scientific institutes, attracting hundreds of thousands of students.

In addition to all these aspects of high culture, the United States has had an even greater impact at the mass level. American films, TV, jazz, blue jeans, and other manifestations of "pop culture" have had an irresistible appeal to the youth of the world (including those who are strongly anti-American in their politics), and have percolated through the tightest iron and bamboo curtains and Islamic screens. Add to all this the presence of millions of American soldiers in Europe and Asia during and since the Second World War, plus the fact that English had become the common language of the Allied troops—with an effect similar to, though incomparably greater than, that of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic soldiers.

As a result, English has displaced French in almost all its former strongholds: Russia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, and Latin America as well as Asia and the Far East. Only in North Africa and the former French and Belgian colonies is French still the second language, and even there the use of English is spreading rapidly. To continue the passage from the *Economist* quoted at the beginning of this article:

> A study published by *Le Monde* showed that of the 270 million people around the world classed as francophone, only 90 million actually speak French. Among the so-called international languages, French thus trails English (350 million), Spanish (200 million), Arabic (120 million) and Portuguese (115 million).
>
> Still, French retains great prestige. . . . A third of the delegates at the United Nations rely on it to express their views. In the light of the Rigaud report, the French foreign ministry has now taken on the task of supporting the use of French at a realistic level. It will dig in as second language in Europe, Latin America and part of the east.

It may be added that traces of the respect enjoyed by French as the language of polite society still remain. Around 1943 an American professor, along with another American, was caught too close to the Russian zone in Iran and taken to the police for questioning. His very fluent Russian did not impress the sergeant in command or persuade him to release the two. However, when the professor wished to tell his companion something that would not be understood by the Russians, he said a few words in French. "What was the language you were speaking?" asked the sergeant. "French." "Then you must be a culti-

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vated man." "But what is so remarkable about French? I speak Russian" (and, he might have added, a dozen other languages). "No, Russian is like English, a world language, but French is a language of culture." In 1967, in Isfahan, a French-educated Iranian conceded to me that English was useful as a commercial language, but he was utterly incredulous when I told him it had produced the finest poetry in the world. And in Algiers, in 1965, I searched in vain for books in any language other than French. Even Arabic books were found in only two shops, one selling Egyptian and the other Lebanese publications. Things have, however, changed a little since then.

Three more examples of the shift may be given. In the 1970s the Soviets opened a cultural center in the Chilean town of Antofagasta, known as the "Red Port" because of its strong communist element. At that center the first thing the local inhabitants asked for was courses in English! More recently, I asked a Japanese who does a lot of business in China what language he used; his answer was "English, of course." And when Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt used to get together and make disobliging remarks about the Anglo-Saxons, they did so in excellent English.

Needless to say, this state of affairs will not last indefinitely. America's hegemony is already declining, and that of English will presumably follow, with a long time lag. One can surmise that Russian will more and more be used as an international language, reflecting the Soviet Union's growing military, political, economic, and scientific strength. Someday Chinese may assume a position more in line with China's great cultural past and its increasingly powerful present. But, at the risk of being as complacent and unperceptive as Rivarol was two hundred years ago, one can safely say that for many decades to come English will maintain, and may even slightly improve, its position as the leading world language.

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The Victim of the Beautiful Bandit

M. L. HESTER

God! he was strong, rocking through the door
on the balls of his perfect feet.
I was in my teller's cage
counting a cache of pennies, and it was
a normal day, one of those afternoons
in early spring. I would have given him
anything, six kinds of love if he asked.
And I told him that. But he wanted cash.

Afterward they questioned me
why I didn't scream, or trip the silent switch
beside my foot, or merely faint.
And I said: he had no gun,
but determined eyes.
It was my job to hand it over, and I did.

Lately I am bored, so much that
on autumn nights I walk unlighted streets
and kick the leaves; in winter, snow.
And stare each dark-complexioned car
until it's out of sight. It grieves me
to be so plain and drab, a muddy bird
dreaming of eagles. I only want to be told,
and then comply. I'm ready to do my job,
and hand myself over. Like other valuable goods
I will hand myself over.

✪ M. L. HESTER, in addition to writing poetry, also writes novels and books for children.

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BOOKS

Read 'Em, Cowboy!

GEORGE CORE

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WELCOME TO HARD TIMES. *By E. L. Doctorow. Random House. $8.95. Paper, $3.95.*
SALOONS OF THE OLD WEST. *By Richard Erdoes. Knopf. $13.95.*
PANHANDLE COWBOY. *By John R. Erickson. University of Nebraska Press. $12.50.*
FROM THE HIGH PLAINS. *By John Fischer. Harper & Row. $10.*
WILD TIMES. *By Brian Garfield. Simon & Schuster. $11.95.*
DESPERADOES. *By Ron Hansen. Knopf. $8.95.*
JOSIAH GREGG AND HIS VISION OF THE EARLY WEST. *By Paul Horgan. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.*
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THE RANCHERS. *By Stan Steiner. Knopf. $13.95.*
THE SALOON ON THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN MINING FRONTIER. *By Elliott West. University of Nebraska Press. $14.50.*

The West. The West. The American West! What is it? Where is it? Is its realm actual (geographical and historical) or fictive (romantic and mythic)? If Quentin Compson were sitting in the iron New England dark near Harvard Yard and had come from the West, what would Shreve McCannon ask him? We can immediately decide that Quentin would not be compelled to answer: "I dont hate it. I dont. I dont." But nevertheless, the West's complexities would be more difficult to sort out than those of any other American region, the South included.

The books and magazines I have conned in trying to answer this question from the standpoint of the general reader—that is to say, my own—range from autobiography to history to fiction. Most of them come from writers who are drenched in the common actuality of western life and who have devoured its literature. Despite their affection for the place and its history, these writers have not been overwhelmed by regional piety, and blood and irony abundantly exist in most of these books, none of which is a sentimental journey.

The essential problem confronting the reader who is not a specialist—who is not a native and who does not teach western studies or write about the West—is determining whether he is in Marlboro Country, which is the West of popular culture created by Zane Grey, Max Brand, and Louis L'Amour (who said recently: "There are at least twenty-five million people out there that I've never touched at all and I want them. I want every damned one of them"), or the country of the imagination that has been explored by James Fenimore Cooper, Frank Norris, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, H. L. Davis, Wallace Stegner, and others. William Savage in *The Cowboy Hero* and John R. Milton in *The Novel of the American West* limn both countries with vig-

GEORGE CORE is editor of the *Sewanee Review*. His essays and reviews have appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere.

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orous strokes and bold colors. Savage surveys Marlboro Country with considerable savvy; Milton persuasively judges what he deems "the serious literary Western novel." Savage reminds us that the last televised advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes was stamped with the profound assertion that "today, the West is everywhere."

Americans are bombarded by images of the West which are often palpable. Western clothes are selling briskly to all segments of our society, and occasionally one encounters a well-heeled overstuffed lady or gent dressed in twelve or fifteen hundred dollars' worth of drygoods—tailored denims, hand-tooled boots, and various other accoutrements better suited for the Country Music Hall of Fame than for riding the range. Such costumes might make even the Marlboro man blanch or Walt Garrison swallow his Skoal. But many of us are guilty—if in less obvious fashion—of the same sins of romantic self-indulgence.

Sometimes such indulgence not only costs money but entails pain. In days of yore, urban cowboys merely threw the bull; now they try to master mechanical bulls in local bars, often with excruciating results. In the cold light of day the barroom cowboy sometimes repairs to the bar of litigation after he has been patched up in the emergency room. (In times past, western bars spiritous and legal were often synonymous.) Today far more cowboys bite the rug in the bull pits of local bars than are thrown in rodeos. Aaron Latham, a screenwriter turned cultural analyst, says: "In these anxious days, some Americans have turned for salvation to God, others have turned to fad prophets, and more and more are turning to the cowboy hat." The urban cowboy's hat sits over a cranium numbed not only by anxiety but by alcohol. But let us look instead at what is under the hats of real frontiersmen and ranchers.

The books at hand run from the gold-rush West of the mid-nineteenth century to the ecology-conscious West of today. In *Gold Dust,* Donald Dale Jackson presents a brilliantly detailed account of the gold rush written in a rich prose studded with dazzling metaphors. His narrative constitutes a social and cultural history of the Far West at mid-century and a comprehensive study of the travelers and the routes that they took to California. Jackson's picture is complemented and fortified by Richard Erdoes's *Saloons of the Old West,* which is only nominally a history of drinking and roistering. In *The Ranchers,* a book based on many interviews with people who have lived long and satisfying lives in the West, Stan Steiner brings us from the early twentieth century to the present. Knopf, the publisher of all three books, is also the house that issued Conrad Richter's posthumous collection of stories, *The Rawhide Knot,* and Ron Hansen's winning first novel, *Desperadoes.* Within the sacred precincts of 201 East 50th Street in Manhattan must lurk a cowboy manqué who is a superb editor.

The fiction under consideration here embodies widely divergent views of the West. Sheldon Bart's ***Ruby Sweetwater and the Ringo Kid*** is a rollicking burlesque not only of the West and western thrillers but of Tammany Hall and Manhattan society (most of the action occurs in New York City) and of writers and the writing profession. Hansen's *Desperadoes* is more serious: intended to recreate the life and times of the Dalton brothers, it succeeds in most respects as fiction (and indirectly as biography); but the author cannot resist the impulse to make his characters sound preposterously eloquent and witty. When Miss Eugenia Moore, the ex-schoolmarm, proposes a toast to her confederates—"Here's to robbery"—we relish the humor and the idiom, as we do when she says, "I'm fickle and strange and common as a hotel, but I do love you Bob Dalton: you're my permanent resident"; but when Grat, the orneriest and most ignorant of the brothers, says, "When I was crossing the desert rattlesnakes struck at my stirrups and spiders drank from my eyes as I slept," the hyperbole of western braggadocio runs riot. And shoemakers and mechanics don't say to one another: "See any evildoers?" When Hansen is not putting implausible (if amusing) speeches into the mouths of his characters, one takes the novel as an essentially straightforward depiction of the Daltons' meteoric career as train and bank robbers. There is a serious underlying theme, which the narrator (and putative author), Emmett Dalton, states. The railroad, he declares, is "the working man's enemy. . . . This is civil war." But the Daltons are not Robin Hoods, and Hansen is too shrewd to portray them as anything but law-

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men turned thieves who enjoy their new work and who cherish their notoriety.

Brian Garfield's *Wild Times* is another novel that is written more nearly as entertainment than as fiction of the highest order, but the history of Hugh Cardiff's life as a marksman and showman may strike us as so exact and convincing that we may assume the story is a roman à clef, an assumption that the author scotches in his afterword. *Wild Times*, like *Desperadoes*, is compulsive reading: only a reader with prejudices as ingrained as Edmund Wilson's against detective fiction could fail to enjoy either novel, and even professional historians should admire the exactness of detail.

Both Hansen and Garfield write extremely well and are adept not only at sustained narrative but at scenic representation. Cardiff's accounts of his shooting matches, especially those that begin and end *Wild Times*, and Emmett Dalton's pictures of the Dalton brothers' depredations are tours de force which nearly any fictionist might envy. The zest and bravado of both novels are infectious, and the apparently casual asides, especially in matters of detail and of illustrative anecdotes, are impressive. (Hansen describes a man felled in a gunfight: "His white shirt was twisted out of his trousers and his pale belly showed, so that he resembled a workingman napping in the grass at lunch hour." Garfield's protagonist addresses a crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, I feel like Cherokee Bill, who stepped upon a platform a little like this one to be executed. . . . When asked for his last words, Cherokee Bill said, 'I came here to git hung, not to make a speech.' ")

Two recent reprints demonstrate the wide possibilities of western fiction. In *Six-Gun Country*, Dodd, Mead has retrieved a serialized novel by Max Brand from the files of *Western Story Magazine*. Popular fiction of a very low order, it lacks nearly every dimension of serious art, but I must give Brand his due: he has a strong narrative sense and keeps his story moving quickly, regardless of the logic and inevitability upon which plot depends. In contrast, E. L. Doctorow's first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times*, is good fiction by any reasonable standard: the author's allegory of good and evil has the stark symmetry of a morality play. The opening scene is so powerful that the remainder of the novel is affected by a faint element of anticlimax, but when the action rises to its wrenching culmination, the opening scene (which has foreshadowed all that follows) is repeated mutatis mutandis. The return of the Bad Man from Bodie, who had left pillage, destruction, rape, and murder in his wake, seems as fated and unavoidable as sin and death. As the final sequence (which involves several bloody tableaux) unfolds, we feel the terrifying crush of a recurring nightmare from which there is no escape and no surcease. At the end the narrator is left to write his bleak tale of pride, fallibility, and corruption. "We can never start new," he concludes; "we take on all the burden: the only thing that grows is trouble, the disasters get bigger, that's all." Although the Bad Man from Bodie is dead, so is the town and nearly everyone in it, and the narrator's adoptive son will take the bad man's place.

Doctorow's narrator is an amateur accountant and lawyer who acts as the town's mayor. As he writes his grim history to leave a record of life in Hard Times, he asks himself and the reader: "Have I showed the sand shifting under our feet, the terrible arrangement of our lives?" His voice and idiom are consistent and convincing, but the force of his story is slightly diluted by his literary self-consciousness. This doubleness, or blurred focus, that may occur when a sophisticated narrator writes his story, produces a belletristic effect in not only *Welcome to Hard Times* but in *Desperadoes* and *Wild Times*. The most self-conscious of the narrators, Emmett Dalton, is the least persuasive. Such a problem would never crop up in a novel by Max Brand. This terrible fluidity of self-revelation, as James put it, is a mark of both highly sophisticated fiction and a complex view of reality. *Welcome to Hard Times* is the most successful of these novels because Doctorow holds his narrator and protagonist under tighter rein than do Hansen and Garfield, who are inclined to let their speakers become too articulate, witty, and perspicuous for the limitations of their characters.

In his burlesque of the western thriller, Bart takes this literary self-consciousness as an inextricable part of his donnée, for the Ringo Kid leaves the West to become an author in New York, and the point of his dis-

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guise is that as the author Ephraim Cornbougher he will kill himself in writing an account of the Ringo Kid's death. So disguised, the Ringo Kid has a series of improbable adventures and misadventures which prominently involve Ruby Sweetwater, a madam masquerading as a virtuous and reform-minded grande dame, and Butch Cassidy, alias Jim Ryan, a New York man-about-town. Bart introduces his funny spoof with an improbable story ascribed to A. J. Liebling. This delicious parody not only introduces the various masquerades and unveilings which constitute the narrative base but provides the humorously belletristic ambience that modifies and orchestrates the action. Bart's stock of literary devices, which includes several characters who are literate to a fault, involves both the biographical and autobiographical impulse, so that Cornbougher is forced by New York's chief of detectives, an ambitious Irishman, to start writing his biography. In the end the Ringo Kid and Butch Cassidy escape from Joe Lefors, a dogged Pinkerton man, when Butch shows Lefors Ringo's book, which bears the subtitle "With a True Account of the Tragic Death of the Ringo Kid, the Bandit Prince of the Western Frontier." The satire, which is reinforced by O. Henry's role as a minor character, enables Bart to cast a wider net than he could otherwise: in effect, he writes a dime novel about the dime novel while regularly making such remarks as "Life is not like a dime novel."

The dime novel (and references to actual people like Doc Holliday and William F. Cody) is much in evidence through *Wild Times* and *Desperadoes*, for each narrator avers repeatedly that he is telling the true story of his life and thereby setting the record straight. This pattern of assertion and disavowal enables the author to indulge his penchant for hyperbole, and each novel contains dozens of improbable (but engaging) incidents and delectable stretchers that are "proved" by their not being so unbelievable and outrageous as they were when originally presented in earlier versions (chiefly in oral renditions and in dime novels). Garfield is especially adept in this department, for he creates a major character in *Wild Times* who is a preacher, reporter, romancer, and impresario that writes dime novels by the bale. But finally neither Hugh Cardiff nor Bob Dalton (the protagonist of Emmett Dalton's story) becomes an epic character in the popular romantic mold. Both authors are too sensible for that.

That all of these novels (with the exception of Brand's) are saturated with such a high degree of literary self-consciousness is understandable, for the overlay of popular attitudes about the West makes it difficult for a writer to confront his subject directly, and postmodern art is infected by the artist's self-consciousness. In their foreword to *Writers of the New West*, the spring 1980 number of *Tri-Quarterly* which is devoted to short fiction (with stories by such established writers as Cormac McCarthy, Raymond Carver, and Thomas McGuane and such younger ones as Ralph Beer), William Kittredge and Steven M. Krauzer put the issue well. They describe the author's "difficulty of telling . . . stories when expected to write from inside the myth." The writer must find the bedrock of myth—fact—and build from there, regardless of myth.

The novelist or short-story writer can find the West in part by reading journals, diaries, autobiographies, histories, and other factual accounts. It is often instructive to compare factual and fictive versions of the same experience. Richard Marius's fine novel, *Bound for the Promised Land*, and, to a lesser extent, *Wild Times* and *Welcome to Hard Times*, recreate the terrible privations of the people who inched along the overland trails to the California gold fields, an experience that constitutes a large part of Jackson's *Gold Dust*. A contemporary analogy appears when one juxtaposes John R. Erickson's *Panhandle Cowboy*, a crisply written account of the author's "four years as a cowboy and manager of a ranch in the Oklahoma Panhandle," with Kent Nelson's first novel, *Cold Wind River*. Both books, like Jane Kramer's *The Last Cowboy*, are devoted to life on a working ranch, a ranch owned by a wealthy absentee landlord whose interest in the ranch is fitful to indifferent. The way the manager carries out his job is crucial to the success or failure of the ranch. But, as Erickson says, "Ranching is not just a job. . . . It is a style, a tempo, an attitude."

Nelson shows how men who live and work together react to poor management. His protagonist, Carl Murcer, is, unlike the other

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characters, a self-starter. The other leading figure in the action, Craig Foley, is an alter ego to Murcer, acting out the negative impulses and emotions that Murcer feels but represses. The main action of *Cold Wind River* involves the daily round of work as it is disrupted and undercut by contingency. The drowning of a ranch hand in a cattle drive leads to Murcer's building a bridge against the ranch boss's inclinations. The boss then steadily loses his authority with the men, partly because his wife and Foley are having an affair. When the gathering tensions boil over, the lives of most of the characters are shattered, but Murcer is left to sort out the wreckage. Nothing so dramatic or final occurs in *Panhandle Cowboy*, but Erickson makes it painfully clear why ranching is simultaneously such a demanding and rewarding way of life. As a father and his son say in *The Ranchers*, "If you like outdoors and if you like working with animals, ranching is the way to do it. . . . But it is still hard work. Ranching will always be hard work." In such a life even "recreation was hard work. . . . And in some ways, working cattle was easier than having fun." The conclusion: "We did everything hard. It was our way, our way of life."

In Beadle's dime library, the cowboy's way of life was portrayed as romantic and carefree. But we know from historians like Mari Sandoz and cattlemen like Ed Lemmon, Philip Ashton Rollins, Charles Siringo, and Jack Thorp (authors whose work, like much other essential western history and lore, is available from the University of Nebraska Press in paperbound editions) that this pastoralism was hard going. Mari Sandoz characteristically focuses the issues sharply in saying: "To most of the world the cattleman and his cowboys, good and bad . . . are the dramatic, the romantic figures of a West, a Wild West that is largely imaginary. To some of the rest of us, however, the rancher is the encompassing, the continuous and enduring symbol of modern man on the Great Plains." The gritty reality of the rancher's life over the past several generations—the bedrock actuality of abrupt changes of temperature, sickness, theft, fire, flood, and drought—are treated well by John Erickson and Stan Steiner, who offer (in Steiner's words) "an appreciation of a way of life, a homage, a requiem and a celebration, an invocation of the spirit."

John Fischer's *From the High Plains*, a collection of essays that embody a satisfying mixture of reminiscence and history, is a book in the same vein by a better writer. Included among Fischer's many colorful tales are accounts of barkeeps, moonshiners, and imbibers. Saloons and their occupants not only provide the material for Richard Erdoes's *Saloons of the Old West* and Elliott West's *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* but are a staple subject in nearly every book considered here. The most important scenes in *Welcome to Hard Times* unfold in the town's saloon, and the saloon is ubiquitous in *Desperadoes* and *Gold Dust*. Erdoes puts the matter best:

> The western saloon existed because it filled a basic human need, which it is now hard to imagine. It was a place of comfort, a refuge, even a place of refinement where one could rub elbows with a fellow human being. It was a place where they spoke cow talk, where nesters could commiserate with each other about hails and dry spells. The saloon was a place to dispel the loneliness of a month on the range or two months in the back country with only the sheep for company. There were some people who spent most of their waking and a good part of their sleeping hours in saloons. The saloon was all things to all men. Besides being a drinking place, it was an eatery, a hotel, a bath and comfort station, a livery stable, gambling den, dance hall, bordello, barbershop, courtroom, church, social club, political center, dueling ground, post office, sports arena, undertaker's parlor, library, news exchange, theater, opera, city hall, employment agency, museum, trading post, grocery, ice cream parlor, even a forerunner of the movie house.

Without the six-gun and the saloon, the West might still be in the hands of native Indians. The saloon was usually the first building in beginning a settlement. As West emphasizes, such a fixed point in "the restless, ever-moving nature of mining camp society" might or might not lead to a community and the rudiments of civilization, for the "restless gathering seemed less a community than a swarm." He alludes to a newspaper editor who decided "that a collection of many men and a few women simply cannot maintain any system of civil order," a conclusion that one can draw from *Welcome to Hard Times*.

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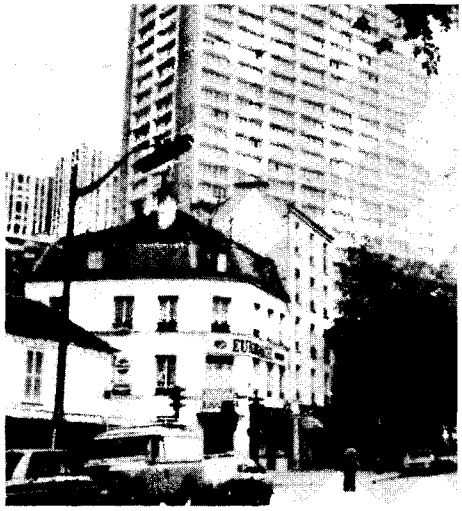

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West and Erdoes demonstrate time and again the centrality of the saloon on the western frontier. Once the frontier had vanished—which entailed the completion of rail lines, the ruthless supression of the Sioux and the Apaches, and the fencing of rangeland—the saloon was a threatened species. The very clergymen who had preached (and drunk, gambled, wenched, and fought) in the saloon now turned against it, as did the wives of the men who frequented it. Prohibition completed the process.

Even the teetotaler can relish the many anecdotes collected by West and Erdoes, especially Erdoes, whose love affair with the West extends over fifty years, from his boyhood in Vienna to his studies of the Plains Indians. Some of the most amusing tales, as one would expect, entail the gluttonous consumption of whiskey and its consequences. The subjects include wakes (celebrants at an Irish wake lost the corpse), tests for sobriety (one was sober as long as he would make a noise), theatrics (Oscar Wilde lectured and drank in dozens of mining saloons while treating his audience to "oceans of whiskey"), the exercise of human rights ("the right of a free citizen to be treated to a drink and buy back"), house rules ("All nations welcome except Carry"; "No drunks in the kitchen"), and ecclesiastical polity (a preacher could no longer brook the interruptions of a drunk and, "finally, drew from his pocket a 'blood purifier' with which he silenced the heckler—forever").

In the end, as Erdoes observes, "the high-rollers were replaced by penny-ante players. The whole population changed. The land of bull-whackers and prospectors became the home of God-fearing farmers who went to bed with the chickens. The pistol-packing badman was rendered as helpless as a crocodile on Times Square. Finally, the women and preachers combined to outlaw public gambling altogether in most places just as, a few years later, they managed to outlaw public drinking." What these keepers of the public morals would think of bull pits in present-day urban cocktail lounges is a matter that lies beyond the scope of Erdoes's richly detailed and lavishly illustrated book.

Erdoes and Jackson are among today's best historians of the West in its heyday. They allude to dozens of writers, including well-known authors like H. H. Bancroft, Richard Henry Dana, and Francis Parkman, who chronicled the opening of the West, and naturally they draw on these and other contemporary accounts. But both men are at their best in drawing on the observations of minor figures, some of whom are writers only in a titular sense. Jackson is particularly good when considering the tribulations involving the overland journeys as these were experienced and recounted by John Woodhouse Audubon and, especially, J. Goldsborough Bruff. In describing San Francisco, he is equally acute in drawing upon the writings of a better-known author—Bayard Taylor. Of the men who survived the hazardous journeys to the gold fields, Jackson writes: "They had deserted the ordered precincts of home for this tattered village of gold-hungry men, three thousand miles from mother and a hundred miles from law. Their reward was ten dollars a day and all the rumors they could swallow. It was a life of brandy, monte, blackjack, and whores, of the smell of fear and the taste of failure, of nettlesome memories of family back home, of long days of toil and short nights of blessed relief." At the end, in 1850, as Jackson points out, the odds against the individual prospector had become prohibitive, and then a French correspondent wrote the epitaph: "The time of miracles is past. . . . The awakening is all the more terrible as the dreams had been so glittering."

One of the best chroniclers of the West was Josiah Gregg (1806–50), whose *Commerce of the Prairies* is a classic of western history. Paul Horgan, himself a respected historian and novelist of the West, has been fascinated by Gregg for over forty years; and in *Josiah Gregg and His Vision of the Early West* he skillfully integrates old and new material into a pithy and perceptive study. "In his anomalous position among the arch-typical men of his time," Horgan writes, "Gregg may be taken as an illustration of the man of mind or vision, in a society of movement; but, as such, he may be also a harbinger of our ideal maturity, in which, within our corporate character, as we find individually in his, we may hope to see the freedom of educated men combined with the sense of democratic responsibility." In describing this "intellectual frontiersman of the natural world," Horgan continues his analysis of Gregg's prophetic

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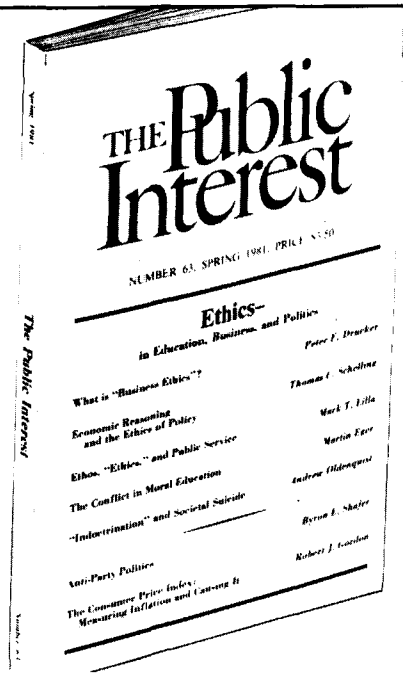

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DURING THE NEARLY SIXTEEN YEARS since its founding, *The Public Interest* has been the leading forum for thoughtful discussion of those issues of public policy that most affect our lives and livelihoods.

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"Ethos, 'Ethics,' and Public Service." Mark T. Lilla, Managing Editor of *The Public Interest*. Today's schools of public policy and administration increasingly emphasize "ethical analysis." But, Lilla maintains, this "abstract ethical reasoning" is devoid of moral content. The result, he fears, may be to teach future public officials "how to justify their actions with high-flown excuses" instead of the "duties and virtues that make up the moral life of someone in a democratic government."

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status: "He is among those of our national autobiographers who, simply because they were articulate and honest men, tried with the labors of their lives to make cultural awareness the simple norm of American life."

Cultural awareness was often far removed from the chuck wagon and saloon, as we have seen; and it dawned slowly and fitfully—and then chiefly after the frontier was closed. It might be argued that the life of the mind is antithetical, if not inimical, to the physical life of the frontier, and that only the outsider can report accurately on the frontier as it is moving. One of Stan Steiner's ranchers, Boyd Charter, observes: "We have our backs against the wall. We are going to be the last generation of western men if we lose. There's no place to pioneer anymore. Nowhere to go. Nowhere to run to. Nowhere to hide. When we die, America dies." The frontier spirit embodied in Charter, the son of a man who "had ridden into history with Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," is not dead. It may be dying in the West; yet it lives in Alaska (as does a rough-and-ready camp society), as John McPhee and Joe McGinniss have recently shown. But the West itself is far from played out as a literary resource. As Horgan says, "Whether in romance or fact, the subject of the American West remains inexhaustible."

Donald Dale Jackson tells us that the motley survivors of the gold rush expeditions to the Far West—either overland through the plains, or by land and sea through the isthmus of Panama, or by sea around Cape Horn—often said of their ghastly ordeals and narrow survivals that they had seen the elephant. In one sense, seeing the elephant means experiencing the world, including being seduced by its sensual pleasures; but the kernel of significance is harder, deeper, at once more suggestive and crystalline: seeing the elephant entails seeing so much of life that nothing can surprise the viewer, not even death itself. A nameless character fleeing Hard Times after the town is fired says to the mayor as he leans over a corpse: "Well I have seen the elephant." The western experience in its strictest and sternest configurations is the elephant, and writers like Jackson, Doctorow, Erdoes, and Horgan make us realize anew what a complex fate marks the American West.

For Interpretation

UNDER THE SIGN OF SATURN. *By Susan Sontag. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.*

Reviewed by NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR.

Fifteen years ago, in the spiritedly opinionated manifesto with which her first book, *Against Interpretation*, began, Susan Sontag wanted to express a great weariness of all the commentary and exegesis that give to our modern literary inheritance a well-nigh overwhelming kind of weight. She was harboring a very fierce animus toward the enterprise of "interpretation" which tends, as she argued, only to deplete the literary universe and to set up what is merely "a shadow world of meanings." Indeed, she did not hesitate even to speak of the hermeneutical act as "the revenge" that is taken by the infernally meddling and arrogant intellect on the world of the poetic imagination. And she declared her own preference to be for those works of art—the music of Milton Babbitt and Morton Feldman, the painting of Mark Rothko and Jasper Johns, the films of Antonioni and Godard, the narratives of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet, the dance of Merce Cunningham and James Waring—which are "motivated by a flight from interpretation" and which, instead of proposing (in the Arnoldian sense) a "criticism of life," give rise to "something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgment in a state of thralldom or captivation." The really "interesting works of . . . art," as Miss Sontag laid it down, are nothing more than "adventures in sensation"—"apolitical and undidactic"—and the interpreter's project, in its devotion to the hegemony of the Idea, is calculated only to muck about in the sensuous surfaces of the particular work, seeking to arrange them into some "mental scheme of categories."

It was an impudently simplistic sort of poetic that was set forth in *Against Interpretation*, and one whose wrongheadedness

NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR., is Commonwealth Professor of Religious Studies and professor of English at the University of Virginia. Among his books are *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation*, *The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred*, and *The Poetry of Civic Virtue—Eliot, Malraux, Auden.*

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was hardly to be gainsaid, since we may be certain that Dostoevsky did not write *The Possessed* or Conrad *Nostromo* or Mann *Doctor Faustus* or Malraux *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* merely to offer some "adventure in sensation." But given the quasi-terrorist kind of assault that Miss Sontag in the mid-sixties was inclined to mount on the whole hermeneutical enterprise ("In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art"), one cannot resist remarking the small irony that is made by the avidity with which, nevertheless, she herself has kept a commitment to the business of interpretation, though occasionally venturing into fiction and filmmaking. At the end of the sixties in her book *Styles of Radical Will* she was discussing, among others, E. M. Cioran and Georges Bataille and Pauline Réage (the pseudonymous author of *The Story of O*) and Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard. And now the essays which appeared at regular intervals through the 1970s—on Roland Barthes and Paul Goodman, on Antonin Artaud and Elias Canetti and Walter Benjamin, and on the filmmakers Leni Riefenstahl and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg—have been gathered into her latest collection, *Under the Sign of Saturn.* Reprehensible as she considers interpretation to be, Miss Sontag is, it seems, by natural inclination too much the scholiast to lay it aside.

"I came into the world under the sign of Saturn," said the critic Walter Benjamin, and so great is Miss Sontag's fondness for those who bear such a mark that a complete collection of her critical studies might well be issued under the title of her latest book. Normally she deals in her essays only (as one no doubt ought to do) with those for whom she has a strong sympathy. She is, of course, capable of talking brilliantly about music and painting and cinema and literature and philosophy and virtually anything; but one finds it difficult to imagine her writing on Robert Frost or Benjamin Britten or Edward Hopper—and though she is on record as having a great sympathy for Simone Weil, one, again, cannot easily imagine her summoning an equal sympathy for such important religious thinkers as Martin Buber and Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Rahner. For she reserves her partisanship for those whose cold, dry, melancholy gravity places them greatly to the left of center and who approach the canonized wisdom of modernity with a ferociousness that intends to reduce it (in the term she uses to define Benjamin's aim) to "rubble." In short, to employ that most ultimately laudatory epithet in her lexicon, the "exemplary" figure is the extremist—who must, yes, be brilliant and innovative but who, above all else, must represent an iconoclasm for which nothing has any sort of privileged status.

Miss Sontag knows, of course, how very nearly inexhaustible is the benignity which in our time is extended toward those cultural movements which define themselves by their difference from and antagonism to accredited sentiment and doctrine, and she knows how quickly and voraciously these movements are swallowed up into the fashionable orthodoxies of the age, just in the process of coming to be admired and understood. Yet, when she is in effect telling us why we should pay attention to one of her favorite Saturnines, she is often herself unintendedly cooperating—and it doubtless causes her some chagrin—with all those assimilative forces that aim at incorporating the adversary culture (as Lionel Trilling called it) into that larger culture which it wants to oppose.

In her long essay on Artaud—which is, I think, the most interesting piece in her new collection—Miss Sontag is careful to warn us how "fiercely out of reach" and unassimilable this insane genius is destined to remain, even for those who are most fully alive to all the fearful pathos of his flawed work and haunted life. Yet she ends by subsuming Artaud under something like the sort of cant about madness and creativity that was modish a few years ago under the influence of Norman O. Brown and R. D. Laing. She cannot, of course, burke the fact of Artaud's madness, since it rendered him incompetent throughout long periods of his life and since his writings are filled with "the cries from his fractured consciousness." And though he himself conceived there to be a natural affinity between genius and madness, Miss Sontag does not fail to remark that "he never suggests that there is anything liberating in losing one's mind"; on the contrary, he knew that "being mad is . . . unending pain . . . and it is that pain," she says, "which Artaud renders." But she does not want us to distance ourselves from his testimony "by remembering that . . . [he] was

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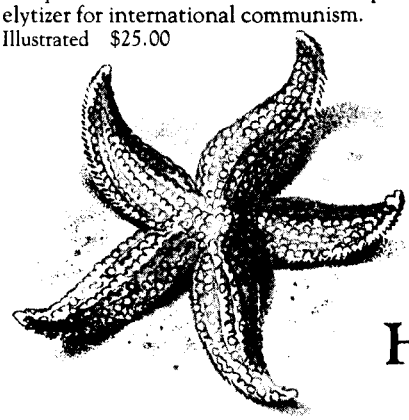

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crazy." "A mad person," we are told, "is someone whose voice society doesn't want to listen to." And much is said about the social relativity of definitions of madness. Miss Sontag appears to have more than a little sympathy for Artaud's notion that madmen may know "so much truth that society takes its revenge on these unhappy seers by outlawing them," and she urges that he be thought of as "someone who has made a spiritual trip for us—a shaman." His, in other words, was a *holy* madness, whose "authority" lies not in the applicability of his arguments but in the "intense discomfort" that they cause us. Which is itself a line of argument that, if not cant, comes distressingly close to it.

But, though the essay on Artaud takes a wrong turning, it is in the main a brilliant and moving performance. Here was a man—"one of the last great exemplars of the heroic period of literary modernism," as Miss Sontag rightly says—whose work includes plays, a historical novel, prose poems, verse, essays on the theater, writings on literature and cinema and painting, hundreds of letters, and much else; and this vast oeuvre is, very nearly all of it, dedicated to his attempt at reckoning with the bewilderment and rage and terror that constituted his own excruciating mental agony. It is, indeed, with an extraordinary purity of sentiment and precision of statement that Miss Sontag expresses the staggered wonderment that is awakened by the sheer quantity of the man's suffering, and no one else has traced out so acutely as she does the "kind of physiological phenomenology of . . . unending desolation" that his work presents. In the mid-1920s Artaud gave his suffrage to surrealism, under the mistaken assumption that its desire to colonize new realms of consciousness betokened a metaphysic of despair; but, once he realized how alien despair was to surrealist sensibility and how exultantly optimistic was the main drift of surrealist thought, he cut loose from it with repulsion and contempt. And Miss Sontag very accurately identifies the Gnostic tradition as that which really presides over Artaud's sense of abandonment, of demoniac possession, of being trapped in a world hopelessly torn by the oppositions between body and mind, matter and spirit, and the powers of darkness and light.

In its eloquence, Miss Sontag's essay on Walter Benjamin almost rivals the essay on Artaud, but it is by no means so penetrating. Nor is it very original, for it is deeply indebted to Gershom Scholem's splendidly comprehensive essay on Benjamin in the *Xth Yearbook* of the Leo Baeck Institute, which is frequently quoted and made use of in various ways but never carefully identified. And this essay differs most especially from the essay on Artaud in its failure to convey a sense of the central motives and energies that were at work in Benjamin's career. True, much of his writing (like Artaud's) represents an attempt at coming to terms with the vicissitudes of his own inner life, and this side of things Miss Sontag keeps in full view in her discussions of *A Berlin Childhood* and the *Berlin Chronicle* and *One-Way Street*. But Benjamin was a consummate dialectician; indeed, his principal claim on our attention is that of one who is to be accounted among the most original thinkers of this century in the field of literary theory and criticism, and Miss Sontag does scant justice to what is here at issue. She gives large place to the book on the origins of the German *Trauerspiel*, which is undoubtedly the most significant of his early publications. But the great essays on Gottfried Keller, on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, on Leskov, on surrealism, on Baudelaire and Proust and Kafka, and on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—these focal texts are either merely alluded to or are not spoken of at all, and so much else is ignored. Nor is any real attempt made at reckoning with Benjamin's distinctively metaphysical and theological interests. Which makes it inevitable that, for all its deftness, Miss Sontag's account of things should appear somewhat perfunctory and should perhaps even suggest that Benjamin's extraordinary scope simply surpasses her reach.

Her essay on Syberberg's *Hitler, a Film from Germany* is, of all her numerous writings on cinema, one of her finest performances. This seven-hour-long phantasmagoria she no doubt properly regards as being most deeply rooted—in its scale and repertory of theatrical devices—in Wagnerian music-drama. The kinds of close notations she offers on its use of spectacle, on its images and symbology, and on the fundamental poetic of cinema which it reflects make a fine model of

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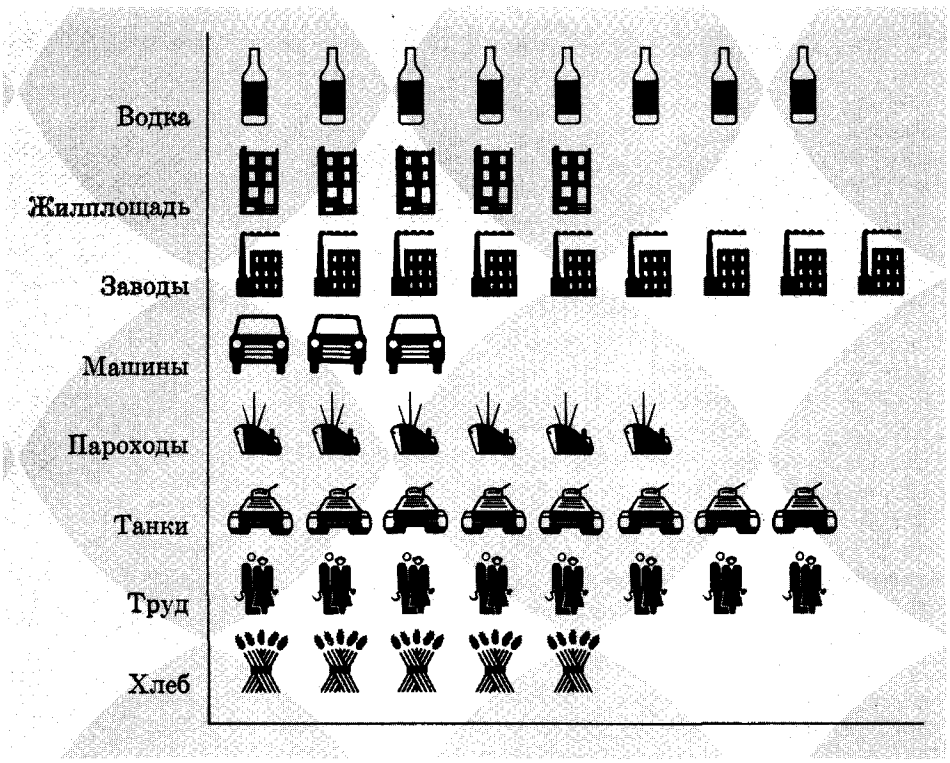

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what film criticism can be when it is being done by a superbly intelligent interpreter. Miss Sontag declares Syberberg's *Hitler* to belong to "the category of noble masterpieces which ask for fealty"—which prompts me not to quarrel with anything she says about this particular film but rather (for all my own inordinate appetite for movies) to wonder if *any* film succeeds finally in asking so much of us. Is cinema in our time destined to be the medium which synthesizes "the plastic arts, music, literature, and theater—the modern fulfillment of Wagner's idea of the total work of art"? I don't know, but Miss Sontag doesn't quite persuade me that the question is necessarily to be answered in the affirmative.

In any event, her discussion of Syberberg's work is impressive, and rather more so than the polemical piece on Leni Riefenstahl—which, so far as it goes, is unobjectionable, but one wonders why it is that Miss Sontag does not bother to indicate how she has come to her present distaste for Hitler's favorite filmmaker. Just fifteen years ago, in *Against Interpretation*, she was inviting us to "cherish works of art which, considered in terms of 'content,' are morally objectionable." She was telling us that " 'content' is . . . [merely] the pretext, the goal, the lure which engages consciousness in essentially *formal* processes of transformation," and she was then prepared to call *The Triumph of the Will* and *The Olympiad* "masterpieces." Today, however, she views with disgust the attempts at purifying "Leni Riefenstahl's reputation of its Nazi dross." And one wonders how she has gotten from point A to point B.

Of the remaining essays in *Under the Sign of Saturn* the piece on Elias Canetti is the most substantial and, within brief compass, says interesting things about *Crowds and Power*. But, though she mentions it in passing, one wishes that a critic of her gifts had chosen to speak in a large and closely detailed way of Canetti's remarkable novel of 1935, *Auto-da-Fé* (published, in C. V. Wedgwood's fine translation, by Knopf in 1947 under the title *The Tower of Babel*), which has for so long gone virtually unremarked on the American scene.

The other two essays are slight memorial pieces on Roland Barthes and Paul Goodman—admiring, affectionate, and beautifully designed, though of inconsiderable weight. But I somehow like the opening passage of the essay on Goodman:

> I am writing this in a tiny room in Paris, sitting on a wicker chair at a typing table in front of a window which looks onto a garden; at my back is a cot and a night table; on the floor and under the table are manuscripts, notebooks, and two or three paperback books. That I have been living and working for more than a year in such small bare quarters . . . undoubtedly answers to some need to strip down, to close off for a while, to make a new start with as little as possible to fall back on. . . . Even during periods when I don't go out at all—and in the last months there have been many blessed days and nights when I have no desire to leave the typewriter except to sleep—each morning someone brings me the Paris *Herald Tribune*.

This is doubtless a bit self-indulgent, in the image of ascetic dedication to the disciplines of *écriture* that the author projects for herself, and it invites an ironic response that circumspection would not risk. But the *ethic* being invoked for the literary life, of stripping down, is by no means ignoble—and, if Susan Sontag adheres to it, the great promise she represents may eventually win larger fulfillments.

Can Philosophers Be Angry?

MOORE: G. E. MOORE AND THE CAMBRIDGE APOSTLES. *By Paul Levy. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $18.95.*

Reviewed by SONYA RUDIKOFF

G. E. Moore changed the course of British philosophy, was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, and was thought to be one of the three outstanding British philosophers of all time (with David Hume and William of Ockham). Many who knew him thought he was like Socrates. Moore was gentle, sweet-natured, loved plants, flowers, and children. He was unconscious of the risk of ridicule, guileless, without intellectual pride or arrogance, not witty or imaginative, but always curious, modest,

SONYA RUDIKOFF is advisory editor for the *Hudson Review* and is currently working on a study of Virginia Woolf and language.

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childlike, never bored. As editor of *Mind* for many years, he corresponded patiently with authors, conscientious and concerned about suggesting revisions. He lectured three times a week, preparing new lectures each year for twenty-six years. When he went to Buckingham Palace for the Order of Merit, what most impressed him was not the grandeur of the honor or the solemnity of the occasion, but the fact that King George VI did not seem to know anything about Wittgenstein. Unworldly, totally absorbed in philosophy, distinguished (as Bertrand Russell saw him) by his "exquisite purity," he exemplified clarity, tenacity, and integrity, according to Leonard Woolf. Moore's mere presence raised the tone of a philosophical discourse, and made flippancy, sarcasm, or bombast impossible. Gesturing with his pipe and with his whole body, he would exclaim, "*Oh!* You *really* think *that?*" The endearing directness and the force of his simplicity would transform the moment. Woolf and others have called him "saintly."

What, precisely, did they mean by that? What would saintliness mean in a philosopher? It was in the conduct of himself that he seemed saintly, as observed and as responded to by those whose lives and work he touched. Philosophers "doing philosophy," as they put it, resemble other academics in some ways but are very different from academics and intellectuals in others. They may resemble mathematicians most closely, and their discussions have that unmistakable abstractness, that contentlessness peculiar to mathematical problems which seek to catch our interest by asking us to consider a boat trip toward a lighthouse or two children filling a bathtub with water. We know they are not interested in the boat trip or in the children, but in something else, something very different. And those of us who continue to think of the boat and whether the tide is out, or who wonder whether the children filled the tub and whether it overflowed before their mother caught them, are on the wrong track and will never do well in mathematics.

In the same way, when philosophers talk about John loving Mary, or Smith being a brother of Jones, we know that they don't care at all about John or Mary or Smith or Jones. When they talk of personal identity or of names, they are not at all interested in these matters as we understand them, such as why the baby was named Horatio and how he turned out, what happened to Adeline, to Aidan and Zoë. They are after something else, something more like "the infinite meaning of words unadorned," to use Virginia Woolf's phrase about Moore. Philosophy is supposed to be the guide to life. However, philosophers do not support their arguments about life with documentation from life, but with the reinforcement of logic and canonical argument. So naked an enterprise could be quite unpredictable in its course and outcome, dangerous, potent with risks and traps, with unspecified vulnerabilities, debacles, triumphs.

When philosophers present themselves for contest with their peers, they seem to be entering the lists in some terrifying tournament presided over by unidentified rulers and judges—such medieval images come to mind. So abstract a victory, transcendent, unrooted, could be intensely pleasurable; so abstract a defeat intensely unpleasant, perhaps unbearable because unlimited. Of course everyone behaves properly, and philosophers and academics generally resort to physical violence so infrequently that when several years ago some members of a philosophy department began literally beating each other up over philosophical matters, no one could believe it, not even when the newspapers publicized it. The abstractness of the philosophical enterprise, or of theoretical work in the academic disciplines in general, is emphatically not to be interpreted as denoting a lack of passion or involvement. This was the mistake D. H. Lawrence made about Bertrand Russell: failing to see that the extensive argument, the definition of terms, the refining of concepts and propositions are activities which involve the passions quite as much as the more obvious occasions for passion. And Russell, of course, lived all his life in passions of personal as well as public dimensions.

Moore's passions could be intense. Even late in his life, in the 1940s, people who knew him in New York remember how angry he could become at a philosophical argument he thought false or stupid or inconsistent. And it was always true of him. When, in 1917, a young philosopher, apprehensive about Russell's criticism, read a paper before the Aristotelian Society, Moore's relentless attack was so frightening—a violent thumping of

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Fowles, Irving, Barthes

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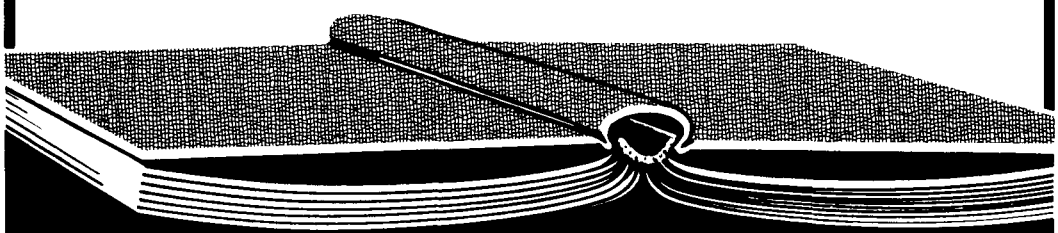

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the table, with "What on *EARTH* do you mean by *that?*"—it obscured all fear of Russell!

Moore was always passionately involved in music as well as philosophy, and there are numerous accounts of the way he would sing lieder, accompanying himself on the piano, so intensely moved and engaged that sweat poured from his face, mingling with the tears evoked by Schubert, and he would finish in exhaustion. He sang in this way on some of the famous early reading parties in Cornwall and Wales. Sometimes, with the same emotional transports, he would play the entire orchestra part of a concerto while Wittgenstein whistled the violin part. In later years, and with the same intense feeling, he would accompany himself singing *Die beiden Grenadiere* at the yearly Commemoration Feast. It is worth pondering what, precisely, might be the relation between these stories and the reports of Moore's saintliness.

Moore's feelings were violent not only when he encountered false argument, but toward the proponents of such argument as well, and toward false behavior. The economical language of his letters recounts how something "sickened" or "revolted" him. When someone agreed with him "it was a great comfort," but when he thought he had "put the thing *in itself* so strongly that nobody could differ from [him]" he hated opposition. On one occasion he was "cooking in silence [his] anger and tedium," on another he insisted that he would "like to be modest but [he sees] some merit in hating"; he spoke of his own "violence," of being "furious," of anticipating that he would "hate" Shaw, having found something of his "wicked." He once noted that "Keynes somehow leaves a bad taste in [his] mouth." He hated Graham Wallas, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and detested George Trevelyan, whom he found so "intolerable" that he "didn't like to be in the same room with him." Moore's passions are often called "pure" and even "Dostoevskian": he seems to have reminded people of Prince Myshkin in purity, candor, lack of vanity, and innocence. Russell spoke of Moore's "caring passionately about the subject, obviously feeling it quite overwhelmingly important to get at the truth, thinking so hard that whenever he came to a stop he was panting—only just enough aware of his audience to keep him talking, otherwise absorbed in his topics." Surely a part of this purity must have consisted in Moore's own effort to define the anger and hostility he felt. He would write pages about his relationship to George Trevelyan, describing his state of mind and examining his anger as if it were a philosophical problem to be disentangled, as if he were interrogating himself about what, precisely, was meant.

Moore's hostility toward Russell was pervasive during 1898–1904, although he remained cordial, visiting Russell and his wife, playing football at Friday's Hill. Nevertheless, he disliked Russell so much that, in 1903, he refused to have him on a reading party. In 1910, seven years after the appearance of both *Principia Ethica* and *Principles of Mathematics*, and after many years of their influencing each other's thought, Moore could feel excruciating anger at Russell, in "very hot dispute" and fury because Russell didn't want to go on with a discussion "about objects seeming bigger and smaller," or about propositions and self-evidence during a weekend visit.

Moore's relations with Wittgenstein constituted a similar chronicle of complex simmering anger, which finally resulted in an estrangement from 1914 to 1929. In 1915, in the midst of acrimonious letters between Russell and Wittgenstein that mentioned Moore, and against the background of deteriorating relations between Moore and Russell, Moore wrote in his diary, "Think what ought to do about Wittgenstein and what is right generally." Wittgenstein was notoriously volatile and emotionally fragile, and was often embroiled in quarrels, apologies, misunderstandings, and contretemps. Like Moore, he was thought to exhibit a certain "purity," innocence, and childlikeness—that set of qualities Leonard Woolf called upon Tolstoy and Socrates to legitimize. And Wittgenstein was another who, although he didn't like him, commented on Moore's lack of vanity, his charm and kindliness. The photograph of Wittgenstein taken by Dorothy Moore shows him looking beyond the camera into the distance, grasping his right hand with his left, in awkward self-conscious self-restraint. Of him Russell once observed, "He declaimed for a long time and I thought he would murder me!" And Karl Popper thought himself threatened by a poker as Wittgenstein was discoursing

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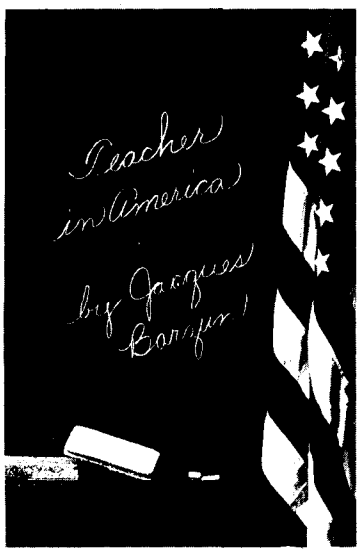

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on moral rules. When Popper called attention to it, Wittgenstein threw down the poker in a rage and stormed out of the room.

Those outside philosophy, reflecting on these complex and violent relationships among philosophers, may with good reason pay close attention to the circumstances in which this discipline is maintained and advanced. It would not be surprising, for example, if large national and social crises provoked extreme idiosyncratic reactions among philosophers. And so it was with Moore and his contemporaries during World War I. Russell, of course, became notorious for his pacifism, and Wittgenstein returned to Austria to enlist on the other side. Moore found himself fascinated by the war—the conscription fight and the politics of it—although he thought the war itself horrible and wrong, unlike McTaggart, Whitehead, and other Trinity philosophers whose energies were consumed in the ferocity of patriotism (McTaggart, the believer in agape; Whitehead, Russell's mentor and collaborator, a founder of the Society of Fellows at Harvard). Moore examined all the implications of pacifism and conscientious objection to the war, both for himself and as the exemplary figure for so many younger men. He was so disturbed by the entire question that he thought he might go mad (and many did during those years); but thinking helped, the methodical scrutiny of meanings and the logical implications of certain positions, although at one low point in 1915 Moore noted in his diary, "Feel incapable of thinking so read *Mind*." McTaggart had been his teacher and an important influence on him; Russell was by this time an intellectual enemy, although they shared in antiwar activities. The systematic violence of a civilized country at war with other civilized countries might provide McTaggart with the necessary articulation of violence—he whose efforts until then had been so energetically directed toward the clarification of Hegel and the disentangling of "woolly" thought—but for Moore the distress was intense and the articulation not achieved in such a neat fit.

The designation of Moore as saintly and great came early. It was the way people felt about him *then*; certainly by 1903, and later, say, in 1913, when, at a philosophical gathering, Moore, "purple in the face and beating his hands on the table," impressed Lytton Strachey and his friends as a genius and "grand maître." Obsessed by problems and by the language of problems, reporting himself lazy and reported by others as saintly, Moore's intensity could nevertheless be accommodated by the conventions of philosophical discourse. His unique and eccentric intellectual habits could easily be tolerated in the conventions of that English life lived by the very small class of men who had been at certain public schools and then at certain colleges at Oxford and Cambridge before World War I. The colleges, the High Table, dining in Hall, the small societies, the double firsts, the wranglers and senior classics, the triposes—all generated a vocabulary and a combative style of which only hints and echoes now remain. Fragments may emerge, as, for example, in the remarks in Keynes's obituary (in 1946) which noted that "his wit was shattering and his capacity for rudeness was unequalled," but predictably added that however fierce the controversy, Keynes was "so charming that even those wounded could not bear a grudge." It is with this context in mind that we can understand how—although in 1914 Moore felt so violently about Russell that he would not sit next to him in Hall and arranged to have his place changed—once, in conversation, Russell asked Moore, "You don't like me, do you?" and Moore, after reflecting, said "No," and then they went on with philosophy. Moore's unique personal expression in all its strangeness created no problems in this ambience.

And anyhow, they were all Apostles—Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, Woolf, Lytton Strachey, G. H. Hardy, Keynes, Whitehead, McTaggart, Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, and earlier, Sidgwick, Monckton Milnes, F. D. Maurice, Clerk Maxwell, Tennyson, Hallam. It was a small secret society, founded in 1820 (and still flourishing today), a "society of equals enjoying each other's foibles, criticizing each other's characters, and questioning everything with complete freedom." McTaggart, in the violence of his patriotism, may have led the fight to expel Russell from Trinity, but Russell remained an Apostle. They kept unbroken continuity with their founders and with those who came after them; they had secret rituals and understandings; they had their own idiom, their own way of posing questions for discussion, their

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Dated: August 13, 1980

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own dialect within the private Cambridge language which was at the same time the language of the great world. There was constant commerce with the great world. Although many of the Apostles became merely the skilled disputatious polymaths produced in abundance by the educational system of the time and maintained in comfort by the social structure they adorned, others became men of letters, some of them great scholars, statesmen, public servants.

They met every Saturday night to read papers and discuss them in a style that Lytton Strachey's biographer calls "intellectual pugilism," a style which even in Tennyson's day required that "everyone hit his neighbor, intellectually, right and left, and was hit again, and no mark left on either side." The papers with cryptic and quixotic titles presented in rudimentary form some of the philosophical problems which were to engage Moore and Russell. They and other Apostles, who would become dons or masters or civil servants or writers, refined their skills by jointly addressing and contesting such questions as: "Can we mean anything when we don't know what we mean?" "Achilles or Patroclus?" "Is it virtuous to wash?" "Should things be real?" "Cleopatra or Maggie Tulliver?" "Is it dangerous to learn facts?" "Is anything as good as persons?" "Is indigestion an ultimate reality?" They might argue all night, but always ended with a vote and with sardines on toast. There was an annual dinner, attended by old and young, in London at some hotel such as the Savoy, where undergraduates might sit with eminent jurists, politicians, scholars, explorers, barristers, colonial administrators, clergymen, and country gentlemen. Election to the Apostles was for life.

Paul Levy's recent book about Moore and the Apostles is interesting especially for the development of methods and themes in Moore's thought. But despite engaging the question of Moore's saintly nature—Moore's renown, which was attributable as much to his nature as to his philosophy—Levy's report raises many more questions than he can adequately handle. It is a difficult subject, admittedly. No one can write on these matters, of course, without interviewing Lord Annan, Sir Alfred Ayer, and Sir Isaiah Berlin. So many other people have to be thanked too, from Miss Ainsworth, the sister of Moore's great friend, to the late Leonard Woolf, and including Lord Llewelyn Davies, Nigel Nicolson, Michael Holroyd, Lady Rothschild, Lady Wedgwood, and the Duchess of St. Albans. Many people have died since they gave information to the author: E. M. Forster, Duncan Grant, Sir Roy Harrod, W. J. H. Sprott, Alix Strachey. The list of acknowledgments itself conjures up the ambience Levy felt was important to survey, encompassing old Bloomsbury's survivors and heirs, Oxford and Cambridge philosophers, American philosophers, eminent civil servants, important archivists, publishers, librarians. The author reports that the book took ten years to complete, that he had extensive help and support from innumerable people, that the resources of three universities were called upon, that some people read the manuscript versions many times. So massive an effort, so copiously attested to, virtually invites a more exacting scrutiny. *Moore*, in fact, is interesting but unsatisfactory. Perhaps the author knows the ambience too well, perhaps there was too much devotion and assistance and intimacy—the acknowledgments are so extensive, the bibliography so spare.

There is an occupational disease in these inquiries, an affliction that attacks American scholars with especial virulence—that is, the enchanted identification with the Victorian intellectual aristocracy. Twenty-five years ago Noel Annan offered some subtle insights about this aristocracy and, ever since then, there has been such intoxication with the panorama of sisters and cousins and aunts, that genuine social understanding escapes. The great-nephew of Macaulay may have married the great-niece of Matthew Arnold, and Moore may have come from an eminent Quaker family linked to the Clapham Sect and the radical and Unitarian families, but the value of this knowledge is questionable without some attention to the structure of the world being examined. Levy gives no hint, for example, of the procedures or criteria governing recruitment to the Apostles, or any sense of Trinity or its social composition at the time Moore was there, or of Cambridge and the character and relative magnitude of the milieu singled out for scrutiny. Thus, when we read of the Apostles vetting new recruits, or of their loyalties, their careers, their failures and accomplishments, there is really

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no way to evaluate the significance of these matters.

Moore's famous personal qualities are especially not illuminated in this perspective. There seems no way to derive them from the Victorian intellectual aristocracy or to account for his immense moral authority without adding other observations, another theoretical framework, different material. The atmosphere of civilized containment of violence in which Moore lived roused suicidal thoughts in Russell, emotional disturbance in Lytton Strachey, mental breakdowns in those Macaulay and Arnold descendants after they married, insanity in Roger Fry's wife, neurasthenia in Leslie Stephen, insanity, recovery, and later suicide in one of Leslie Stephen's daughters, and so on. With Moore, what seems especially noticeable now—and perhaps it was then as well—is that despite the atmosphere of violence in which the philosophical vocation was pursued, even *by which* it was sometimes pursued, there was to be generated not more violence in himself or against himself to meet it, but, instead—absorbing the violence of others—philosophy. This formulation may not come any closer to what has been understood about his saintliness, but would it help to know what, precisely, is meant by saintly?

Specific Levity

SYDNEY SMITH. *By Alan Bell. Oxford University Press. $29.95.*

Reviewed by JOHN CLIVE

To write the biography of someone known mainly for his verbal wit is one of the toughest assignments for the biographer. Even dead politicians can be brought to life by a skillful revivalist. But the lightning flash of the right riposte, the cut and thrust of polemical comment, above all the playfulness and gaiety of those chosen spirits who possess an unerring sense for the ludicrous in human affairs—these rarely outlast their original occasions. And when they do, they are often better preserved in anthologies of wit and wisdom than as parts of "lives" which may not, in themselves, hold a great deal of interest for the general reader.

The life of the Reverend Sydney Smith (1771–1845) is a case in point. As the original projector of and one of the leading contributors to that powerful engine of liberal Whiggism, the *Edinburgh Review*, as the author of that brilliant tract in favor of Catholic Emancipation, the *Letters on the Subject of the Catholics, to my brother Abraham, who lives in the country* by "Peter Plymley" and, above all, as the progenitor of innumerable jokes and sallies, the best of which have become part of the English language, "the Smith of Smiths" has left a deservedly permanent mark on the political and intellectual history of nineteenth-century Britain. His biography as such, though, holds no great drama or surprises. He was happily married, and for twenty years (1809–29) he held a living in rural Yorkshire before moving to another in Somerset. Toward the end of his life, as a canon of St. Paul's Cathedral and heir to his wealthy brother Courtney, he had achieved financial security as well as a certain amount of fame, though not the bishopric he so greatly desired. He died peacefully in his seventy-fourth year.

Alan Bell probably knows more about Sydney Smith than anyone else alive. His forthcoming edition of Smith's *Letters* will add an enormous number to—I really can't resist saying it—the existing canon. His biography certainly serves to whet our appetite for those letters, from some of which he quotes liberally. Bell makes no excessive claims for originality or novelty of interpretation, but confines himself to the attempt to tell the story of Sydney Smith's life and work, briefly, sensibly, and accurately. He does insist on calling him "Sydney" throughout—something that rubs me the wrong way—but that no doubt reflects on me rather than on Mr. Bell. Unlike some others who have previously written about Smith—authors who seem incapable of extricating themselves from their own perpetual fits of hilarity over their subject—Bell manages to keep a straight face when the story requires it.

That occurs on several occasions. Some of the hitherto unpublished correspondence between Smith and his father, Robert, reveals

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the considerable strain that existed between the two. Robert Smith, a prosperous London businessman, treated all his children badly, but his son Sydney worst of all. After the death of his mother, Sydney Smith invited his bereaved father and sister to visit him in Scotland and received an answer to his invitation in which his father called him "Rascal, Villain, Fool, Scoundrel, Pedant, etc." Nevertheless, the son was conciliatory: "All these opprobrious epithets, as well as your animadversions upon my wife, I *do* now as I have often *done* before very sincerely forgive."

Sydney Smith's own frequent fits of depression, to which—like some other famous wits—he was subject all his life, were not quite so easily dealt with. But we owe to them not only his famous points of advice to Lady Georgiana Morpeth on how to deal with "low spirits"—they include taking showers with a small quantity of water at a temperature low enough to give a slight sensation of cold, as well as "short views of human life not farther than dinner or tea"—but also his sketch "Of Cheerfulness," with its counsel that "persons subject to low spirits should make the rooms in which they live as cheerful as possible, taking care that the paper with which the wall is covered should be of a brilliant, lively color, hanging up pictures or prints, and covering the chimney-piece with beautiful china."

In his youth, Sydney Smith used his wit to do battle for liberal causes. In the *Edinburgh Review* he attacked public schools—where "every boy is alternately tyrant and slave"—and the Game Laws, as a result of which "for every ten pheasants which fluttered in the wood one English peasant was rotting in gaol." He took up the cudgels against the Society for the Suppression of Vice—"at present they should denominate themselves a society for suppressing the vices of persons whose income does not exceed £500 *per annum*"—and for civil and religious liberty, and toleration. But after the great Reform Bill was passed in 1832—Sydney Smith's immortal contribution to that passage had been to compare the opposition of the House of Lords to a certain Mrs. Partington who, during the great storm of 1824, had tried to push away the Atlantic Ocean with her mop—his polemical writings, as Mr. Bell points out, "show him increasingly as a defender of insti-

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tutions rather than as an advocate of political change." Thus his *Letters to Archdeacon Singleton* (1837) attacked the Whigs' Ecclesiastical Commission whose recommendations, Smith felt, threatened the establishment, revenues, endowments, and patronage of cathedrals, while not being severe enough with the income and patronage of the bishops. The Whigs, Lord John Russell in particular, were not persuaded by the Singleton Letters. Indeed, Lord John, a personal friend, had accused the old *Edinburgh* reviewer of having become a lover of abuses. That was something that Sydney Smith vehemently denied, adding, with some justice, in a letter of 1835, that "you must not forget of me that I began attacking abuses between thirty and forty years ago when it was safer almost to be a felon than a reformer." However, Smith's final political intervention was his pamphlet against the secret ballot and universal suffrage (1839). But even here, in what was intended to be a tract against the danger of popular anarchy, Smith granted that "many really honest men may wish for these changes; I know, or at least believe, that wheat and barley would grow if there was no Archbishop of Canterbury, and domestic fowls would breed if our Viscount Melbourne was again called Mr. Lamb; but they have stronger nerves than I who would venture to bring these changes about."

What makes this passage so effective is its concretion. Not "if there were no Lords," but "if our Viscount Melbourne was again called Mr. Lamb." And it is this same infallible instinct for the concrete, for the specific, that helps to account for the power and memorability of Sydney Smith's wit, polemical or otherwise. Here, for instance, is "Peter Plymley" on the then prime minister, Spencer Perceval:

> If I lived at Hampstead upon stewed meats and claret; if I walked to church every Sunday before eleven young gentlemen of my own begetting, with their faces washed, and their hair pleasingly combed; if the Almighty had blessed me with every earthly comfort—how awfully would I pause before I sent forth the flame and the sword over the cabins of the poor, generous, open-hearted peasants of Ireland!

Here is Sydney Smith, in his own persona, writing to Lady Holland about partridge shooting by the clergy, of which he disapproved: "Ten thousand good shots dispersed over the country do more harm to the cause of religion than the arguments of Voltaire and Rousseau." As a member of the "King of Clubs," in London, he had reported to Sir James Mackintosh in India (1804): "Nothing has occurred in the club. We have been lemonade ever since you left us—we were punch before." Much later, in his capacity as canon of St. Paul's, he rejected an application to increase the number of boys in the choir, in these terms:

> You talk of competing with other cathedrals, but cathedrals are not to consider themselves rival opera houses. We shall come by and by to act anthems. It is enough if your music is decent, and does not put us to shame. It is a matter of perfect indifference to me, whether Westminster bawls louder than St. Paul's.

What links those two statements, written forty years apart, and on such different subjects, is clarity, vigor of expression, and, above all, the force of specificity. Punch differs from lemonade. A big choir "bawls" louder than a smaller one. There can be no mistake about meaning.

Alan Bell's biography reminds us that there are few writers in English—Swift? Orwell? Cobbett?—who can match Sydney Smith at his best. Who else could have said, "We have no great opinion of indicting men into piety," or could have talked about Africa (in 1807) as "a place returning no members to parliament, but still, from the extraordinary resemblance its inhabitants bear to human creatures, of some consequence"? The answer to that question is: Only the same person who wrote, "If you choose to represent the various parts in life by holes upon a table of different shapes,—some circular, some triangular, some square, some oblong,—and the persons acting these parts by bits of wood of similar shapes, we shall generally find that the triangular person has got into the square hole, the oblong into the triangular, and a square person has squeezed himself into the round hole." As Alan Bell's biography makes clear, Smith himself occupied the right hole—with his clerical rotundity, presumably a round one. Mr. Bell demonstrates convincingly that Sydney Smith's "eating pâté de foie gras to the sound of trumpets" was meant to convey

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Henry Luttrell's, rather than Smith's, idea of Heaven. My own idea of Heaven remains eating pâté de foie gras to the sound of Sydney Smith.

Be Cool

DRYLONGSO: A SELF-PORTRAIT OF BLACK AMERICA. *By John Langston Gwaltney. Random House. $12.95.*

Reviewed by ROBERT G. O'MEALLY

In Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, the protagonist tells a Brotherhood party member that to find out what is really happening in black Harlem he must go "to the gin mills and the barber shops and the juke joints and the churches. . . . Yes, and the beauty parlors on Saturday when they're frying hair. A whole unrecorded history is recorded there." As if with this in mind, in the early 1970s John Langston Gwaltney conducted hundreds of conversations and "folk seminars"—in barbershops, bars, and private kitchens—with friends and neighbors (and their friends and neighbors) in "more than a dozen northeastern black American communities." From these transcribed talks he selected forty-two narratives, ranging in length from two to twenty pages, that comprise the essence of *Drylongso.*

Gwaltney's informants are not the black political and intellectual leaders whose words sound through the pages of Robert Penn Warren's excellent compendium of interviews, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* Nor are they the street dwellers and hustlers sometimes taken as the true representatives of *the* community. "This is not," explains Gwaltney, "another collection of street-corner exotica but an explication of black culture as it is perceived by the vast majority of Afro-Americans who are working members of stable families in pursuit of much the same

ROBERT G. O'MEALLY is visiting professor in Afro-American Studies at Yale University and assistant professor of English and Afro-American Studies at Wesleyan University. His book, *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*, was recently published by Harvard University Press.

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kinds of happiness that preoccupy the rest of American society." In talking with "drylongso" (a Deep Southern black term for "ordinary") black city workers, Gwaltney's intention was to drive to the core of black culture, to have ordinary black women and men tell what gives their lives meaning and what threatens to take it away.

What recommends *Drylongso* is certainly not its revoicing of racial wrongs. The principal flaw here, in fact, is that the author, in effect if not in intent, shaped the interviews and the resulting narratives to exaggerate black people's inclination to rehearse the familiar facts of life in America. Rather than indulge in the tired complaining or posturing that pervades *Drylongso,* most blacks carry on their lives as if the "omnipresent" white world, however relentless and deadly, were holed up on the other end of the galaxy. Still, *Drylongso* is an extraordinary book. Its extraordinariness lies in its success as an experiment in native anthropology, a method that sends the student into the depths of the culture he knows most intimately.

The native anthropologist goes home to examine his own group, and encourages the group itself to generate the "perspectives, philosophies, and systems of logic" by which it is to be understood. Native anthropology avoids rigidly schematic preconceptions and refuses to view those under study as capable of producing "only unrefined data for the omniscient stranger to interpret." The black anthropologist John Gwaltney is very aware of the black community's wariness of social scientists who rush in with tape machines cocked to capture half-truths. One of his informants, Mabel Lincoln, told him that blacks learn early to "say a thousand maybes for every yes or no to anybody they don't know and the foreigner walks away happy. Nobody in the world can say 'Uhn-huhn' like we can." Gwaltney writes:

> Anthropologists have often been the uninvited, boorish guests of the people they study. . . . Properly understood, native anthropology can be the beginning of the most fruitful exchange in the entire history of social science, for, in the broadest sense of the term, there is not one of us who is not a native somewhere. When significant attention is devoted to what any given people think of themselves, then the concepts "cross-cultural" and "relativity" will attain their most proper meanings.

Refreshingly, Gwaltney is an anthropologist unable to forget the warning implied in the words of another informant, Othman Sullivan: "I think this anthropology is just another way to call me a nigger." Happily, too, *Drylongso* moves far beyond superficial talk of racism to unravel the deeper mysteries of those forms, rituals, and values that inform the Afro-American's sense of life, beyond any question of white hatred and prejudice.

Of *Drylongso* Maya Angelou has said, "Not since the 19th century slave narratives have so many black Americans told such truths to white America." If *Drylongso* is an extension of the slave or ex-slave narrative, it is also in keeping with the current emphasis, in popular as well as academic writing, on the viewpoint of the woman and man from the bottom to the middle of the social hierarchy, outcasts from "official" histories. In Eric Foner's words, "a remarkable transformation has occurred in the writing of history in the last ten years. . . . New fields such as black history, women's history, and 'history from the bottom up' have come to dominate the profession. . . . The experiences of 'ordinary' men and women have become the central focus of historical study." Theodore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers* and Nell Painter's *Narrative of Hosea Hudson* are superbly full portraits of black Americans "in their own words"; both have profoundly affected our perspective on the experience of the descendants of black American slaves. Borrowing techniques from novelists and biographers, as well as folklorists and anthropologists, Painter and Rosengarten present not just historical data, but complex statements about real people, filled with rage and humor and great with possibility for error as well as heroism: tough black men with hard-won tales to tell. At its best, *Drylongso* is similarly rich in characterization. Indeed, Ellison has said that this set of sketches of Afro-American lives "provides the reader with a far greater degree of vividly projected, felt experience than is to be found in many a novel."

Drylongso comprises an eloquent definition of black life, an expansive analysis that belongs with Ellison's *Shadow and Act,* Albert Murray's *South to a Very Old Place,* and Amiri Baraka's *Home.* Like these writers, Gwaltney presents a defiantly affirmative portrait of the darker brother. Like them, too,

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he insists that Afro-American life is more than mere survival mechanisms and reflexes learned to cope with white hostility. Instead, black "values, systems of logic and world view are rooted in a lengthy peasant tradition and clandestine theology." What Gwaltney calls "core black culture" is "the notion of sacrifice for kin, the belief in the natural sequence of cause and effect. . . . It is a classical, restricted notion of the possible. It esteems the deed more than the wish, venerates the 'natural man' over the sounding brass of machine technology and has the wit to know that 'Everybody talking 'bout Heaven ain't going there.'" It is good talk and good food and certain cultural styles: "Walking those walks, talking those talks, keeping that cool, showing that turn."

A disciplined and suspicious people, blacks have a tradition of group solidarity (Gwaltney terms it "nationhood") that is "as old as our abhorrence of slavery." This ethnic pride is "not rooted in territoriality so much as it is in the fitness of core black culture" and in the hatred of subordination. "The tradition which is so vital in shaping black culture was founded and fostered by those slave forebearents who are so widely respected for their refusal to accept, in their hearts, the European definition of them as things." Like Ellison, Murray, and Baraka, Gwaltney seeks out those cultural values and styles that have permitted blacks to keep the faith in their American homeland. "Who wills to be a Negro?" asks Ellison in *Shadow and Act.* Ellison's reply: "*I* do." Far from feeling inferior, Gwaltney's informant, Jackson Jordon, Jr., says that "white people have the mojo and the sayso," but the black man sees the white man's "feet of clay and is convinced that the whole body is the same."

Drylongso's anecdotal, fictionlike portraits make clear that blacks are shrewd and dubious witnesses of the American scene. Richard Nixon, whose term of office as president ended while these interviews were under way, emerges as a kind of comic folk villain. In John Oliver's words, "You know damned well that Nixon is the President of the whites, who put him there. If it had been left to us, the dude would still be sweetening transmissions and putting junk cars together for the chumps to buy." When Nixon was forced to resign, other ironies surfaced:

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"Now, if I steal my club money," says Ruth Shays, "there is no way in Christ that these women are going to say, 'Ruth, you got to go, but you can have the sayso about who gets the sayso after you go.' " Shays was in a black barbershop when a boy was sent "to the tavern for something to eat, and the boy came back there and said that the President was out there. Well, most folks didn't move a peg because it didn't mean anything to them. What excites the white man does not move most of us. Now, partly this is because most of us don't want white people to know what does move us, but generally the black people don't like the way that white people are running the country, so we don't want to have anything to do with their big muckdemucks who are making all these little white people out here behave the way they do."

The world of *Drylongso* is topsy-turvy and dangerous. Hannah Nelson remembers: "One time in rural Georgia a white woman and I were stranded in a ditch in her car. When some policemen came and helped us, she was relieved to see them but I was frightened. . . . Well, I knew they would help *her*, but I didn't really think they would help me. . . . I was very glad that the white woman was there with me because she was the only protection I felt I had at that time." As a youngster, Grant Smith heard his family's folktale-like story about his timid Aunt Velma, who "followed my Aunt Betsy to the North, but found it very hard to get used to. She was very worried about getting arrested. She would not take a chance on eating in a restaurant if she saw any white people around. So she got very weak during job hunting. One day she told my Aunt Betsy that she felt she was going to faint. My Aunt Betsy told her that it was against the law for black people to faint in Boston, so she didn't!"

To keep their balance in this uncertain world, blacks have had to maintain a sense of humor; they have also had to cling to their own definitions of reality. To a charitable white passerby, Mr. Jackson, a black blindman, may seem a pitiable creature, but his own sense of things is different. Once when Grant Smith was guiding Mr. Jackson across a street in Georgia, "a white lady thrust a half dollar into his hand. Without changing his pace or expression, he handed her two quarters and thanked her for allowing him to be of some service to her. I can still see the awe and stupefaction on her face!" Straight talk about racial pride also comes from John Oliver, described in a preface by Gwaltney as a tough ex-southerner who "still has a countryman's legs and a countryman's direct, exacting critical faculty, which is sometimes mistaken for simplicity." The cocky Oliver tells Gwaltney: "You give Mose half a chance and he will take over because he is just a better man than Chahlie ever dared to be. Chahlie know that just as well as we do; that's why he keep changing the rules."

Race games and the roles people play is a crucial underlying subject of *Drylongso*. Jackson Jordon, Jr., finds that "the white man must pretend to know more than he does, but we must always show him less than we know." Clifford Yancy, who has worked as a sharecropper, industrial laborer, chauffeur, cook, and gardener, reports that a white man "will tell a black man his most private business because he doesn't really think he is talking to a man or a woman. You know how people say the walls have ears or how some people talk to their dogs? Well, that's what we are to them." May Anna Madison observed: "One very important difference between white people and black people is that white people think that you *are* your work. . . . Now, black people think that my work is just what I have to do to get what I want."

In the midst of all the role playing, the tables sometimes turn, and white employers are left feeling that their black workers condescend to them. Yancy said his boss once complained that "I treated him like he was a fool. I knew I was supposed to ask him what he meant, so I did. 'You treat me as if I didn't have any more sense than a postman or a milkman!' " Sometimes, too, black domestics may exercise surprising influence within the white homes where they work. Ella Turner Surry recalls that her Aunt Sarah "didn't allow certain people in 'her' kitchen. Now, you understand that this frequently included the lady who owned that kitchen! She didn't allow anybody to get out of hand." Whether with whites or blacks, Mabel Lincoln says: "Most of us try to be cool. That is what we respect the most in ourselves and look for in other people. That means being a person of sober, quiet judgment. . . . I don' have to tell you that in the Book of Proverbs, in the

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twenty-ninth chapter in the eleventh verse, it says that 'a fool uttereth all his mind.' Out in the street people say 'Be cool' when they mean look out for something or somebody, but being cool is a more weighty thing than that. My father used to say, 'Laugh with your friends, but smile with strangers.' When I was coming up, you didn't frown with anybody."

Two troubling socio-political issues very much on the minds of the *Drylongso* narrators involve the position of black mothers on welfare and the child-rearing practices of blacks and whites. Concerning the welfare mother, May Anna Madison minces no words: "This business of paying somebody to lay up here and have children that they can't support makes the welfare mother the only black woman who has to depend on some man to get what she has to have." Even more barbed are Hattie Lanarck's comments on welfare mothers: "All these grown women out here having their own United Nations of families with no more husbands than a yard dog has shoes. You can call it whatever you want to, but it is just commonness and nothing else. I never thought I would live to see black women with high school educations living like common barnyard dogs.... You can't take anything this man hands out, because he has a hundred different kinds of chains."

Not that middle-class white parents are admired in these pages—quite the contrary. Jackson Jordon, Jr., feels that "the business of white men is to rule.... They want their children to rule, even to rule them. It pleases them, no matter what they say, when their children are rude and overbearing, because that is a sign to them that those children are getting ready to rule as their parents have ruled." The *Drylongso* narrators would agree with Jordon that "we like a child to be quiet and inquisitive and ahead of his time, but not jarringly so." Politeness and reserve are valued not just for their own sake among blacks; these qualities are nurtured in black children who, as adults, must face a world where black aggressiveness can spell danger. That black parenthood, undermined by a complex of socio-political forces, has gone awry is evident from the extent of the crime by black youngsters against their neighbors. "These young men out here have got a lot to answer for,"

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says Margaret Lawson. "It's getting to be that black people are more afraid to see a young black man walking behind them than they are to see a white person. . . . It's this dope and this revolutionary jive every one of these hoods are talking that is messing up our young black men. [They] are becoming our worst enemies."

While it is thoughtful and alive with real talk, *Drylongso* is by no means without flaw. Indeed, it brings to mind the historian John W. Blassingame's warning for readers of the WPA slave narratives. Every interview, Blassingame says, "had two authors, the person who asked the questions and the person who answered them." When the interviewer was black, informed, skilled in the art of conversation, and uncondescending, the former bondman was sometimes willing to disclose experiences and attitudes withheld with care from hostile whites. Blassingame found that blacks would often answer the wrong interviewer with deadpan lies. Slavery had violently taught them the lessons of caution and concealment. Yet the circumspect reader will find that this history of slavery, for the most part unconsidered until ten years ago—the tale told not by the seller but by the sold—is recited with great force in the narratives of the thirties and forties.

In the contemporary black narratives of *Drylongso*, Blassingame's warning still applies, despite Gwaltney's skill as a sympathetic black anthropologist. In fact, if much of this book's unique value derives from its method, native anthropology, *Drylongso* also suggests certain of the method's shortcomings. Might not the researcher who is a savvy insider feel a bit too free to arrange and interpret his data according to prior inclinations? After all, he already knows his own people. That Gwaltney leaves out the questions which inspired these surprisingly full and fluid narratives belies the fact that each of them has two narrators. If the questions were included in the texts, the reader would be in a better position to decide how far Gwaltney serves as what literary critics term a "reliable narrator."

It seems to me that *Drylongso* is too ready to take one part of the neighborhood as representing the whole nation. Again, I believe that any interviewer, black or white, would be hard put to find forty-two blacks anyplace who would, without quite deliberate prompting, spend so many words describing the ways of white folks. And is it not ironic and perplexing that many (most?) blacks never heard such words as "turn" (good manners) or even "drylongso"—words that crop up in narrative after narrative here? Is it not also questionable whether most blacks would agree with the assertions, affirmed here time after time, that welfare is merely a crippling white hoax, that religion is a useless crutch, or that blacks comprise a nation within their American homeland? These may be Gwaltney's views and those of his associates, but are they really representative enough to figure so prominently in this "self-portrait" of a tremendously diverse group? If there is, as Gwaltney maintains, such a thing as "core black culture," it must be defined broadly enough to encompass the great range of philosophies and styles that one finds across America's multidimensional urban black neighborhoods. Gwaltney's biases, revealed in his editorial choices—whom he chose to interview, whose words he selected for print, how he shaped each narrative—do not give us a true "self-portrait of black America" but that of one of its provinces and, inevitably, of the author himself.

This said, *Drylongso* remains a very impressive piece of scholarship. It is an experimental work, imaginatively conceived and carefully assembled by a scholar with a writer's ear for expressive language. It is a vibrant book, tragicomic in its outlines, born of the determination to define—in terms reminiscent, in their robustness and optimism, of certain of America's finest creative writers—what it means to be a black American. *Drylongso* records an important chapter of the unrecorded history of America's Harlems. Not only does it present current political opinions of blacks who usually have no opportunity whatever to articulate their views before a broad reading audience but, almost like a collection of fictional sketches, *Drylongso* transcends mere issues and conveys a sense of the "note and trick" of life as blacks know it. In a lively manner, this book reveals some of the perspectives, the styles, and the values that grant Afro-American life its conti-

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nuity and its sense of completeness. Moreover, as a careful attempt to have a group under study create the indices by which it is to be known, this is an important book that no doubt will lead to other fine studies in native anthropology.

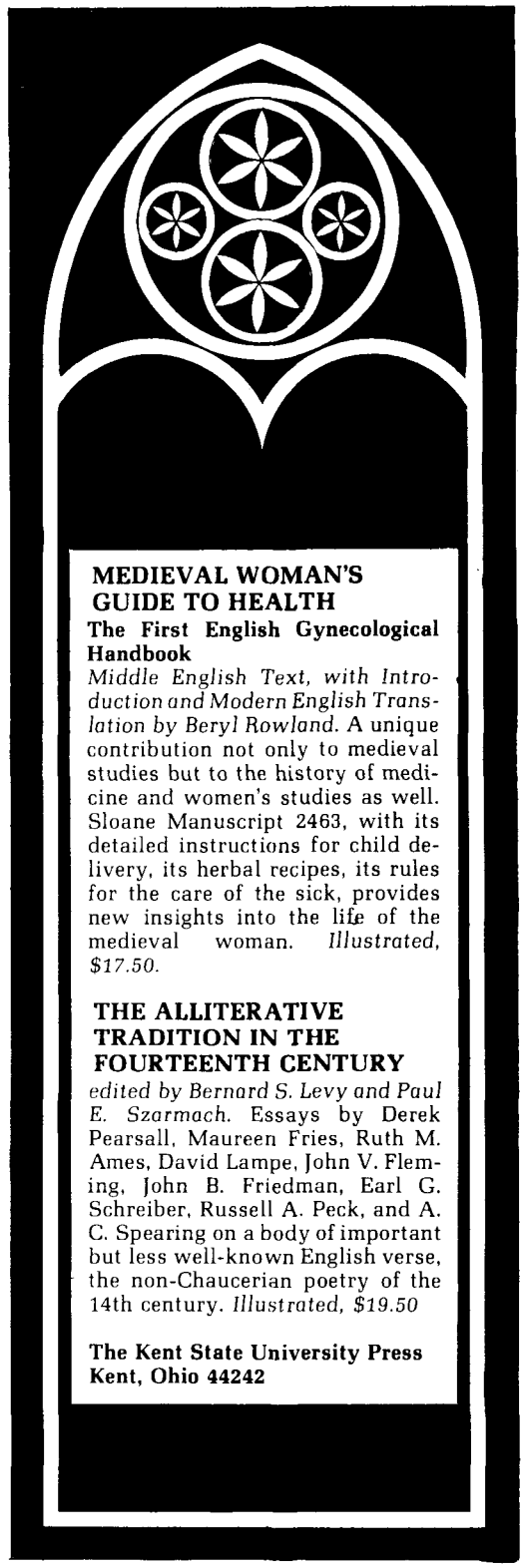
Impossible

THE LETTERS OF EVELYN WAUGH. *Edited by Mark Amory. Ticknor & Fields. $25.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Writing recently about Edmund Wilson's journals, John Updike cheerfully remarked that there was something in them to offend everyone. But compared to these letters, by the writer Wilson once called "the only first-rate comic genius that has appeared in English since Bernard Shaw," they seem quietly inoffensive. Evelyn Waugh was truly what Wilson (with his curt "Edmund Wilson does not . . ." postcards of refusal) sometimes aspired to be: an impossible person. It was a role which came naturally to him, that he worked hard to perfect over the years, and that eventually didn't feel—and doesn't feel to us—like a role at all, just the truth. Waugh's diaries, published a few years back, are likely—in their eight hundred pages of sometimes monotonous recording and complaining—to defeat any but the most devoted fan. The letters, on the other hand, though not without their repetitions and an occasional patch or two of aridity, are eminently available, especially since they have been splendidly edited and selected by Mark Amory, a friend of the Waugh family who has spared himself no labor in doing a fully responsible job. (A trivial and amusing example of his assiduousness: in 1961, Waugh writes to Ann Fleming describing a ball he's attended in Somerset at which the stables were floodlit and the horses consequently upset, "One bit an American pornographer who tried to give it vodka." The "pornographer" turned out to be Norman Mailer, who, when consulted by

✪ WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD teaches English at Amherst College and is the author of *Seeing Through Everything: English Writers 1918–1940* and *Lives of the Modern Poets.*



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the scrupulous editor, admitted that the horse had bitten him, but that he was not feeding it vodka, just patting its nose.)

It is the exasperated Buck Mulligan who, in the first chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, calls his friend Stephen Dedalus "an impossible person," this impossibleness lying in Stephen's ability to take everything said as personal to himself and thus as an occasion for offense. But Joyce was not "impossible" in his letters; among English contemporaries the best challenger to Waugh in this regard is most certainly Wyndham Lewis whose own letters (finely edited by W. K. Rose) are relatively unknown. (As far as I can tell, Waugh and Lewis were unaware of each other's existence; at least neither ever referred to the other.) The liberal consensus has it, I should guess, that D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf are the major modern letter writers among English novelists of this century, and Lawrence was, to boot, as impossible a person as one could hope for. But their reputations may suffer from a glut on the market: six large volumes of Woolfian epistles and the prospect of eight (count 'em) Lawrencian tomes. Waugh and Lewis make their concentrated impact on us through a single fat volume of letters each. And both Waugh and Lewis were blessed, or cursed, by a wildness of humor neither Lawrence nor Virginia Woolf possessed.

It is this curse of humor (the phrase is from Lewis's *Tarr*) which turns the impossible person into not just a possible but a desired presence in Waugh's letters. Tired of hearing Berenson's *I Tatti* mentioned in hushed tones by someone who stopped there for a visit? Here is Waugh's *I Tatti*: "We went to see B. Berenson, like Trotsky, in a house which after Harold's [Acton] is a miserable hole." Tired of trying to convince yourself how, really, you love all your children equally, but in different ways? Here is Waugh: "My unhealthy affection for my second daughter has waned. I now dislike them all equally." Tired of expressing your complex ambivalence toward Dickens as a novelist? "I have just read *Dombey and Son*. The worst book in the world." (Nabokov, by comparison to this, is a moderate, judicious critic.) Admittedly, one-liners like the above, impossible to answer in any reasonable way, speak to our secret wishes that things could be simpler and more final than they usually seem. But at moments, Waugh's "simplicity," his stubborn refusal to accede to the social and psychological imperatives by which the liberal conscience directs its life, result in strikingly new and valuable perspectives. A prime example of this comes when, after his first wife (Evelyn Gardner, "she-Evelyn") has run away with John Heygate, throwing Waugh into humiliation and bewilderment, he tells Harold Acton that he is going to divorce her because "I cannot live with anyone who is avowedly in love with someone else. Everyone is talking so much nonsense on all sides of me about my affairs that my wits reel. Evelyn's family & mine join in asking me to 'forgive' her whatever that may mean." Coming up against that "forgive," in the chilly contempt provided by quotation marks, one suddenly entertains a new way of thinking about things. Is it only the impossible person who doesn't know what forgive means? Are the rest of us sanely clear about it?

Of course it is easy enough to be impossible about non-Englishmen (with Dickens's Mr. Podsnap as a role model), especially when they are of other races and creeds. But it is not so easy to put them into creative fantasies whose comic energy outshines any moral depravity. So in 1933, upon returning to British Guiana from a trip up the Amazon ("The streets are entirely paved with gold which gives a very pretty effect especially towards sunset. But otherwise it is rather dull"), he writes to his correspondent that "the delight of these simple people at my return is very touching. A public holiday has been declared and all the men & women prostrate themselves in the dust and bring me their children to bless . . . several elderly niggers have already died of excitement." Writing from Jerusalem a couple of years later, he notes that "they have a wall here where the Jews blub. V. sensible idea," an observation made especially memorable by the verb choice and by its "sensible" English approval of the odd custom. Or consider the aggrieved self-righteousness of the following confession, written from California, about how Randolph Churchill has behaved abominably, has been "brutishly" drunk, and has "mocked the Jews." We are invited to consider, by com-

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parison, the innocent Evelyn: "I was not in the least anti-Semitic before I came here. I am now. It is intolerable to see them enjoying themselves." What could the poor fellow have done in the face of such frolicking Californian Jews but embrace anti-Semitism? (He later admitted to Nancy Mitford that he possessed a bit of "anti-Jew feeling" but "not anti-Semite. I rather like Arabs.")

Or there is the impossible anecdote, often involving an animal which has somehow wandered into and disrupted Waugh's civilized routine. Here is the young student at Oxford enjoying a delightful adventure: "I went out for a long and solitary walk, as is my custom, accompanied only with my big stick. In an obscure village miles away I met a white dog and—as is also my custom—addressed it with courtesy." But the promising relationship is shattered when the white dog sees the stick, sets up a howl, causing a "virago of a woman" to appear and accuse Waugh of beating the dog. Crestfallen, he departs. As a journalist in Ethiopia in 1935, enduring much boredom so that a "funny novel" can come out of it, Waugh reveals to his wife Laura the failure of his efforts with a different sort of animal: "I had a baboon but he seemed incapable of affection and he kept me awake in the afternoons so I threw him away." Quite right too; there is only one thing to do with a baboon who has no decent human feelings and is also noisy in the afternoon—throw him away, however one does that. Or there is the witty bawdry and wonderfully bad jokes like this public school one about what wines Princess Mary and her new husband will drink on their wedding night: "She will open her 24 year old port and he will indulge in cider (inside her)." As for proper behavior in the London Library (Lady Mary Lygon has just been elected to membership): "Always go to the closet appointed for the purpose if you wish to make water. Far too many female members have lately taken to squatting behind the Genealogy section. Never write 'balls' with an indelible pencil on the margins of the books provided. Do not solicit the female librarians to acts of unnatural vices." After all, standards must be kept up.

The single most extraordinary letter in the whole collection is one written in 1936 to Laura Herbert, who was to become Waugh's

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second wife and the mother of his children. A few months before, he had revealed to his confidante Mary Lygon that he felt he was cutting a less than glorious figure with Laura, who "came to London with me yesterday but it was not a success for I had a hangover & could only eat 3 oysters and some soda water and I was sick a good deal on the table so perhaps that romance is shattered." Evidently not, but in his letter to Laura asking her to marry him, he takes pains to lay out the assets and liabilities of his character, without aid of romance:

> I can't advise you in my favour because I think it would be beastly for you, but think how nice it would be for me. I am restless & moody & misanthropic & lazy & have no money except what I earn and if I got ill you would starve. In fact its a lousy proposition.

On the other hand,

> you wouldn't find yourself confined to any particular place or group. Also I have practically no living relatives except one brother whom I scarcely know. You would not find yourself involved in a large family & all their rows & you would not be patronized & interfered with by odious sisters in law & aunts as it often happens.

Still, it should be remembered,

> all these are very small advantages compared with the awfulness of my character. I have always tried to be nice to you and you may have got it into your head that I am nice really, but that is all rot.

Who could resist such impossible sincerity? Not Laura Herbert, who married him, bore him one child after another, and stayed home during World War II while Waugh engaged in various odd military enterprises, occasionally taking time out to keep his wife up to the epistolary mark: "I know you lead a dull life now. . . . But that is no reason to make your letters as dull as your life. I simply am not interested in Bridget's children. Do grasp that. A letter should be a form of conversation; write as though you were talking to me." Nor was it simply "Bridget's children" he didn't want to hear about: "No particular interest in your doings [he wrote to Laura from White's, his London club]: to hear that Teresa has sneezed or Bron fallen down does not excite me." He had previously begun a letter to her, also written from White's, with the news that "I have regretfully come to the conclusion that the boy Auberon is not yet a suitable companion for me"—this after a day spent together in London.

It was incredibly lucky for Waugh that he married a woman who was, truly, the Angel in the House. The other stroke of luck was his Catholicism, of which there is of course much in the letters and in respect to which he is at his most serious, most fierce. (There is a particularly striking trio of letters to John Betjeman, trying to argue or bully Betjeman out of his halfway Anglicanism.) Unfortunately, at least for this reviewer (a lapsed Protestant and, worse yet, an American) much of the inchat among those of the true church is less than gripping, probably because by the standards set in other letters it's not impossible enough. So in 1955, when Edith Sitwell converts, and Alec Guinness has converted, Waugh writes to the former about how "one great sadness in Catholic life is year by year to count the apostasies—seldom from reason, almost always through marrying outside the Church. . . . Then one hears of the Grace of God steadily reinforcing the ranks. It is a great consolation." Left outside this charmed circle, I'm eager to hustle on to the next letter, when suddenly the convert sounds like something more: "I heard a rousing sermon on Sunday against the dangers of immodest bathing-dresses and thought that you and I were innocent of that offence at least." Saved by the comic bell.

Finally, though Waugh will not be remembered for his magnanimity toward other novelists, it's interesting that he treats his equals without condescension, often with affection and admiration. These qualities are to be found in the letters to Henry Yorke (Henry Green) and particularly in the ones to George Orwell, about *Animal Farm* and *1984*, and to Anthony Powell. "I don't quite know how I would define my admiration," he wrote to Powell on the appearance of volume three of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, "I feel each volume of this series is like a great sustaining slice of Melton Pie. [Editor Amory precisely glosses it as 'Elaborate cold meat pie, specialty of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.'] I

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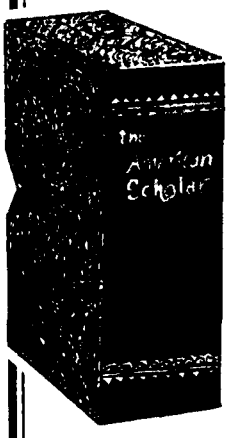
can go on eating it with the recurring seasons until I drop." Alas, he dropped, while *The Music of Time* played on. The letters from his last years are few and short. "Since we last met," he writes his old pal Nancy Mitford, "I have become an old man, not diseased but enfeebled [he was then in his sixty-first year]." Other letters speak about bereavements, "No work, Feeble health." Still, at moments, something caught his fancy, tickled it into the old style of creating, as in this to Ann Fleming:

When I saw the doctor he asked about my habits. I said, "I have practically given up drinking—only about 7 bottles of wine & 3 of spirits a week." "A week? Surely you mean a month?" "No, and I smoke 30 cigars a week & take 40 grains of sodium amytal." He looked graver & graver. "Oh, yes, a bottle of paraldehyde a week." He brightened greatly & said: "Now that is an excellent thing. Far too few people use it."

Not even the grave physician could resist, or so it seems, this particularly impossible patient. The reader may be similarly disarmed.



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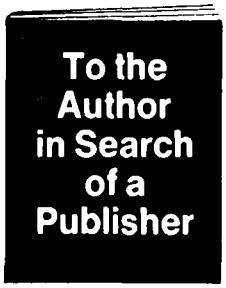

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The Reader Replies

Topless in Hamburg

I write in regard to the "Teutonic scholars" who are cited by Murray Gell-Mann (via Jeremy Bernstein) in the Winter 1980/81 issue as speculating that James Joyce might have run across a grocery store sign in Zurich advertising "Drei Mark für Muster-Quark." Since the monetary unit of Switzerland, in Joyce's day as now, is the franc rather than the mark, I wonder who is pulling whose leg? It seems to have escaped Messrs. Gell-Mann and Bernstein that *Quark*, in colloquial German (yes, even in Goethe's time) means not only cottage cheese but also nonsense (*Quatsch* is its phonetic next-door neighbor and a somewhat stronger word for nonsense).

H. W. Janson
New York, New York

A Bilingual Childhood

I was surprised to see Richard Rodriguez's name once more on the cover of The American Scholar (Winter 1980/81), and couldn't help but wonder what line he was selling this time. In the Winter 1974/75 issue he caterwauled about the impositions of social labels which identified him as a "Mexican American" or "Chicano." Unfortunately, the article, in which Rodriguez detailed his alienation from his parents, and even from himself, pandered the worst features of a stereotypic "identity crisis." As a personal statement about "growing up Chicano," Rodriguez's article painted a deft description of *a* Chicano experience, not *the* Chicano experience. My quarrel then, as now, is not with Rodriguez's right to flail himself in public if he so wishes, but with the easy assumptions his essay reinforces in the minds of nonminorities whose perceptions about minorities are often grounded only in stereotypes. A disclaimer by Rodriguez that he speaks out of a narrow context would allay that timor on my part.

Mischief and malice seem to be Rodriguez's stock-in-trade in his "memoirs," where he glosses over "bilingual education" as if he were footnoting the phenomenon for the first time. "It is not possible," he says, "for a child, any child, ever to use his family's language in school. Not to understand this is to misunderstand the public uses of schooling." Rodriguez forgets (or has never understood) that for decades Hispanic-American children were left to drift like flotsam in a linguistic sea awash with lexocentria, with little thought about their ultimate well-being as lexistents. Year after year Mexican-American children, for example, were decimated in school systems that sought to teach them in a language they had little or no facility with. School systems continued this slaughter despite the pedagogical wisdom that it made eminently good sense to start the instruction of Spanish-speaking children in Spanish. Instead, school systems continued to immerse Spanish-speaking children in the English-language environments of schools, leaving them to catch-as-catch-can. The upshot was a shameful dropout rate two and a half times the national average, a condition well documented by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in its six-part study of the education of Mexican-Americans.

For me the rub of Rodriguez's autobiographic cant is the subtle, liminally pubescent message that having studied English literature he has achieved an unusual distinction. Indeed, it is a distinction worthy of note, but far from unusual. For there are any number of minorities who have also studied the runes of English literature and who resisted the polarities Richard Rodriguez fell prey to. Many of us who came to admire English Renaissance writers and Victorian poets were not racked by the dilemma Rodriguez struggled with. English language and literature (along with Spanish language and literature) widened our aperture of existence, both languages and literatures increasing our self- and social-awareness.

For all his high-powered academic experiences, Richard Rodriguez is a naive young man caught up in the myth of social creeds which insist that "education can teach all children." One must ask what education purposes to teach: that the Pilgrims were our forebearers, that the Hispanic Southwest was devoid of culture prior to the arrival of Anglos, and that the American experience as re-

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flected in American literature is best expressed by nonminority writers?

At one point Rodriguez writes that "assimilation makes possible the achievement of public individuality," explaining that it was because of a "good education that he did not grow up a minority person." I wonder by what values he determines a "good education"? I too received a "good" education but, in contradistinction to Rodriguez, mine made me painfully aware of how much better a good education can be when it reflects the realities and diversities of the American experience, rather than its velleities. I am sure, for example, slave owners of the South who sent their children to prestige schools (which promulgated racist doctrines) thought their progeny were getting good educations.

The essential problem with Rodriguez's thesis is his contention that the word "American" is a cure-all for the ills of discrimination. As an American, I have experienced discrimination, prejudice, and hostility because of being Mexican, being brown and speaking Spanish. Like Rodriguez's parents, my parents were also newcomers to the United States when I was born, and my father too spoke "broken English."

In all fairness, however, Rodriguez does touch upon some truths we need to face up to. Unfortunately many minority children receive little or no opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment in schools.

Many of us expected the New American Scholarship boy to help us in our struggle for human dignity. Instead he has been snared by the glitter of fool's gold in the mines of assimilation. There seems to have been nothing bilingual about Rodriguez's childhood. Quite the opposite: He became what many of us have been saying happens to Chicano children who fall prey to the assimilation efforts of the schools—he became a brown Anglo-Saxon, wanting to be totally English-speaking but haunted by the voices of his ancestors in his head, ancestors speaking to him in the sounds of a language he cannot escape.

Felipe de Ortego y Gasca
Professor of English and
Intercultural Studies
Our Lady of the Lake University
San Antonio, Texas

Richard Rodriguez replies: This stranger taunts me with the label of "brown Anglo-Saxon." And I wonder if he understands what I wrote. He seems determined to misunderstand in order to play pieties on my back.

I titled my article "Aria." It is an essay about sound and word, intimacy and public life, and the consolation of songs. It is an autobiographical essay about my earliest experiences of family, language, and *los gringos*.

For a long time I have listened to politicians and educational experts debate the values and dangers of using a student's "family language" in the classroom. I have listened impatiently. Finally what has to be talked about—and is rarely raised—is that most personal of dramas: the movement of the child, later the man, between private and public societies. This is what my essay was about. One life. My own. My awkward, hesitant movement as a boy between home and the public world of the classroom.

I argued in my article that the lower-class child faces with special uncertainty the burden of being both a public and private person. But, in a way, his difficulty patterns a middle-class parable. All of us must maintain a difficult balance between our public and private identities.

We all have a stake in the deepest issue raised by educational bilingualism. That is why feelings leap high in this debate. Everyone senses that what is involved is much more than a mere pedagogical question. Arguments stammer with slanders. ("Brown Anglo-Saxons.") Pious superstitions are raised in a ritual of ancestor worship. ("The voices of ancestors.") Clichés support illusions. Arguments fail. Adults struggle to protect the decisions they have made or are afraid to admit having to make.

Arawaks

In reviewing my book, *A People's History of the United States*, in the Autumn 1980 issue of the Scholar, Oscar Handlin is beside himself—a formidable juxtaposition. His rage ("biased selections . . . insidious rhetorical questions . . . obtuse . . . deranged") recalls his famous vituperations against other historians—Carl Degler and William Appleman Williams—who simply differed with his interpretations of American history. Handlin was a proponent of the war in Vietnam and a supporter of Richard Nixon, and we might not be surprised if a reviewer with such beliefs were very critical of a book like mine. Yet we would also expect such a reviewer to present the book honestly. Handlin, however, tampers with the truth, repeatedly misleading readers about what my book says.

He summarizes one section: "American aggression continued after Vietnam, rearranged but pursuing the same vile military and economic goals. Not a word about the Soviet Union, of course." Early in the book, I criticize "the easy acceptance of atrocities as a deplorable but necessary price to pay for progress (Hiroshima and Vietnam, to save Western civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary, to save socialism; nuclear proliferation, to save us

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all). . . ." And, discussing the aftermath of World War II, I write: "The victors were the Soviet Union and the United States. . . . Both these countries now went to work . . . under the cover of 'socialism' on one side, and 'democracy' on the other, to carve out their own empires of influence." And on the following page: "The Soviet Union, like the United States, did not seem to be willing to help revolutions it could not control." Not a word?

Handlin has a long paragraph which starts: "This book pays only casual regard to factual accuracy." He then refers to nine statements in my book. Of the first six, Handlin is wrong on at least five. I have room only to deal with the last three, where Handlin seems to think he can create historical facts by fiat: "The Geneva assembly of 1954 did not agree on elections in a unified Vietnam. . . . The United States did not back Batista in 1959; it had ended aid to Cuba and washed its hands of him well before then. 'Tet' was not evidence of the unpopularity of the Saigon government, but a resounding rejection of the northern invaders."

From the "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference (July 21, 1954)," in *Great Britain Parliamentary Sessional Papers*, XXXI, pp. 9–11: "In order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July, 1956. . . ."

On Batista: Here Handlin is just silly. I never said the U.S. backed Batista "in 1959"; after all, Castro took over Havana on January 8, 1959! I did say that in the revolution of 1959 "the American-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista, was overthrown." But how about 1958, 1957, 1956, 1955, 1954, 1953, 1952? That backing started with recognition thirteen days after Batista's ugly coup and continued until it was clear Batista was finished. (See Hugh Thomas's authoritative *The Cuban Revolution.*) "Washed its hands"? According to Arthur Schlesinger (*A Thousand Days*, p. 220), "Arms deliveries to Batista were stopped as early as March, 1958, but the United States military mission remained. . . ."

On Tet: A small group of action officers in the Pentagon, reacting to the Tet offensive, said in their memorandum of February 29, 1968: "The Saigon leadership shows no signs of a willingness—let alone an ability—to attract the necessary loyalty or support of the people. . . ." (*Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, vol. IV, p. 564).

I cannot, in the space allotted to me, comment on all of Handlin's distortions. Behind them, I suspect, is a fundamental difference in our viewpoints which drives Handlin to fury. I am not merely "anti-American"; my book's "dominant tone" is "hatred of humanity." His evidence? "No other modern country receives a favorable mention. He speaks well of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, but not of the states they created." Handlin's logic: Humanity consists of states; Zinn does not speak well of any state; therefore Zinn hates humanity. I do speak well of lots of people, and of many movements of dissent and protest; indeed, that's what most of the book is about. But it is *states* Handlin cares about. And I seem to think there is a humanity beyond states, indeed, that states have generally acted against humanity.

Well, that's worth an argument, but not a fit.

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OSCAR HANDLIN replies: Howard Zinn's letter displays the same inability to present the facts accurately that characterized his book. In each of the three cases he mentions, he is simply wrong.

Page 463 of his book stated: "An international assemblage [sic] at Geneva" agreed that "an election would take place in two years." His letter quotes the final declaration by the British chairman, to which the Saigon government never agreed, and that the United States, not a party in 1954, did not support.

Page 431 of the book stated that in 1959 "a rebel force led by Fidel Castro" had overthrown the "American-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista." The fact that the United States had earlier recognized Batista, as did Cubans of all shades of political opinion including Marxists, is irrelevant; Castro succeeded only after the United States ceased to support Batista. Zinn's purpose, however, is to show the unremitting American exploitative attitude, although Washington did not, in fact, turn against Castro until later.

Page 471, dealing with the Tet offensive, stated: "The unpopularity of the Saigon government explains the success of the National Liberation Front." The fact that a small group of action officers in the Pentagon criticized Saigon's leadership is irrelevant to the fact that the offensive was not a success and that the NLF evoked no signs of popular support.

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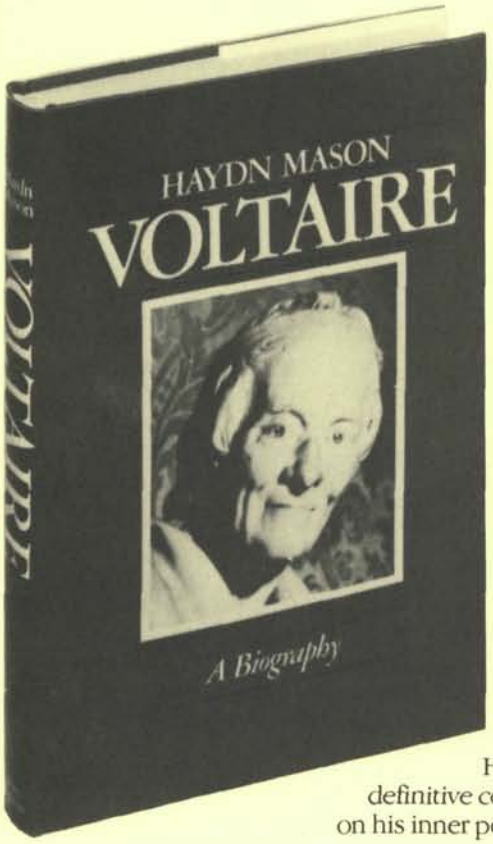

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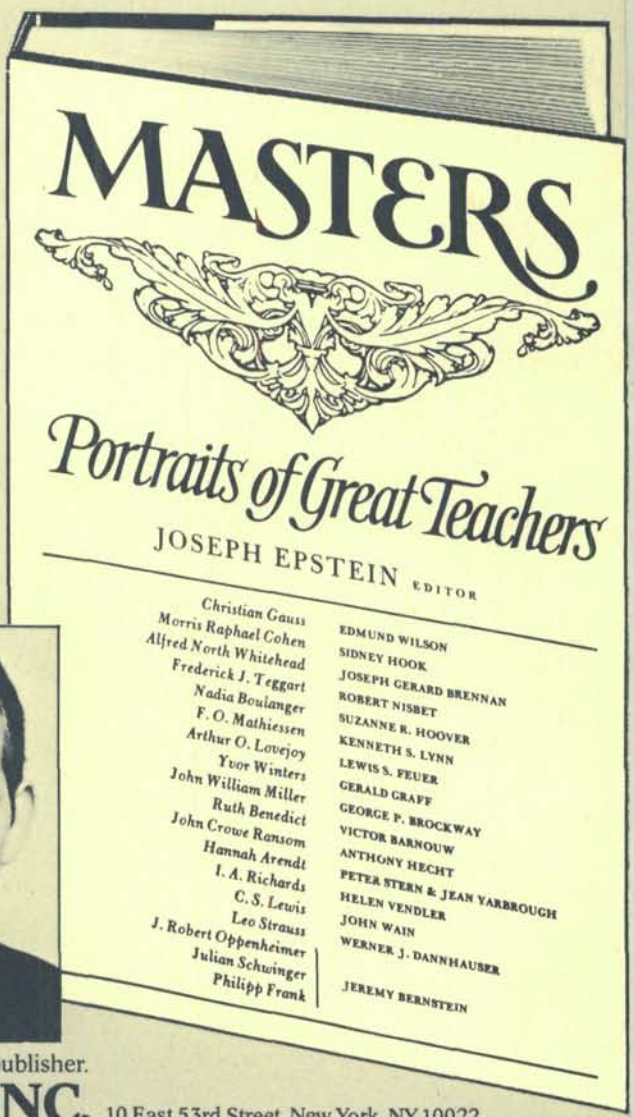

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